

TRAP-NEUTER-RETURN (TNR) Manual





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TNR Manual

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Foreword

This manual was years in the making because it represents the collective wisdom of the people of Animais de Rua plus many other experts within the field, bringing together practical advice and expertise with the most current ideas on TNR. The result is well thought through, tried and tested advice for those who are either starting, or currently running, a TNR programme.

We first encountered Animais de Rua when we visited Lisbon to exchange information and learn from each other with the aim of improving the lives of unowned cats, both on the street and in shelters.

What undoubtedly informs their success is their ability to be pragmatic, strategic, determined and, most of all, always willing to absorb new information and consider different ways of working. They understand that TNR is only part of the bigger picture of cat population management. It may sound straightforward and fulfilling to work with cats and make their lives better, particularly for cats living on the streets, but in reality, it is complicated, multi-faceted and requires a range of skills to stabilise populations and reduce them over time. It may come as a surprise for many that much TNR is done without achieving that result.

Animais de Rua knows that the secret of their success does not lie just in their undoubted ability to trap successfully and with minimal distress for the cats. It comes from planning, good administration, targeted trapping, excellent communication with veterinary partners and community members and, most of all, accurate data collection to track progress. They know that loving cats is not enough – an understanding of what cat welfare really is, along with the ability to minimise stress by understanding and managing cats' needs, is vital.

This manual is a step-by-step guide that starts your journey of discovery into the complexity of the TNR process and gives you some insight into what skills and knowledge are needed to have a successful outcome. Success is measured not just in numbers of cats neutered, but in the stabilisation of a population, continued monitoring and reduction of numbers. Doing this in every TNR programme, no matter how small, will eventually achieve better cat welfare globally.

Claire Bessant

Vicky Halls

Introduction

Almost all of us have had, at some point in our lives, an encounter with an unowned cat: a female that gives birth to a litter of kittens in a backyard, a group of cats which appears every day when a neighbour leaves out food, or the sneaky cat that sometimes will enter through an open kitchen door looking for something to eat.

The global population of cats is estimated to be around 600 million, at least half of which do not have owners, but in reality, nobody really knows the true figures. The majority are cats that live near us, exploiting the resources which we provide, accidentally or intentionally.

Cats have managed to adapt well to the urban environment and, like us, they see the city as their territory. This coexistence between people and cats is not always peaceful: there are people who wish to protect the cats but do it in an inappropriate way, giving them food, that litters the streets; others attempt to control the population using methods that are cruel (eg poison) and ultimately unsuccessful; most people don't want harm to come to the animals but would like to get rid of the nuisance associated with the presence of an out-of-control cat population.

Currently, and in compliance with the guidelines of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), most developed countries promote neutering campaigns, as well as raising awareness of, and informing the society about, the responsible ownership of pets, together with legislation to mitigate abandonment and mistreatment. This integrated approach is the solution to effectively fight the problem of overpopulation of these animals.

Animais de Rua was created precisely to try to alleviate the suffering of these animals and to prevent others from being born under the same conditions. We direct our efforts and resources not only to the promotion of animals' welfare but also to the defence of public health, as well as people's safety and comfort.

Some of our many ways of operation are: Integrated program for population control of stray animals and animals belonging to low-income families, through mass sterilization in partnership with counties; Education program through which we seek to raise awareness and educate our children and young people on issues like abandonment and the value of respect for animal life; Information campaigns on responsible pet ownership.

Animais de Rua's TNR manual aims to present a cat population management strategy, which promotes both the public's health and the welfare of animals: It is aimed at official animal collection centres, animal welfare organisations and informal groups, and at citizens who wish to help the street cats in their community. It includes information about the best, effective, and most current international practices.

It is important to point out that, when implementing a TNR programme, we are interfering significantly in the lives of the animals involved and, therefore, we should try to prepare and inform ourselves as best as possible, in order not to make mistakes that could cost them their lives or cause them unnecessary suffering.



The Lifestyle Spectrum Of The Domestic Cat

International Cat Care, a charity promoting cat welfare, defines a spectrum of cat lifestyles which are common to cats around the world, providing a structure to help in understanding them and the care they need. The names may be different in different places, but the cats' needs are universal. Three broad types of cats exist on the spectrum – feral cat, street cat and pet cat.

Feral cats can be described as:

- Born and living outdoors and likely to have come from generations of feral cats;
- Living independently of people at a relatively low population density in uninhabited areas;
- Likely to be living a solitary lifestyle, hunting for survival;
- Not socialised with people, with no experience of living in a domestic home;
- Likely to be greatly distressed by confinement, including living in people's homes.



Feral cats are unlikely to cause problems within cities, towns and villages because they are not usually seen where there are people. However, they may be of concern to people if they are considered to be a threat to wildlife in uninhabited areas.

Street cats can be described as:

- Born and living outdoors (parents could be street cats or pet cats);
- Free-roaming at a relatively high population density in inhabited areas, e.g., in cities, towns and villages;
- Usually gathering with other cats around a plentiful food source (provided by people and/or scavenged from waste bins);
- Showing some tolerance towards familiar people and may even appear friendly;
- Breeding prolifically and, in some locations where there are plentiful localised resources, forming a group with other cats;
- Not socialised with people as kittens, with no experience of living in a domestic home;
- Likely to be greatly distressed by confinement, including living in people's homes.

Pet cats can be described as:

- Living with people as companions, either exclusively indoors or with free access or limited access outdoors;
- Socialised with people as kittens, between two and nine weeks of age;
- Coping well (ideally) with contact and interaction with familiar and unfamiliar people.

A pet cat is an owned cat, but this may change if it becomes:

- Relinquished – the cat is given up for adoption to a homing centre;
- Stray – the cat wanders away from home and does not return;
- Abandoned – the cat is intentionally left somewhere or rejected by the owner with a view to no longer taking responsibility for it.

Cats seen outdoors within a human community usually consist of neutered or unneutered street cats, abandoned and stray pet cats and pet cats that are currently owned, if they have access outdoors.

What is TNR?

Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) is a humane and effective method of managing cat populations. The process involves the capturing of all the cats from a targeted group, neutering them, surgically removing the tip of their left ear for identification purposes, and providing treatments such as deworming, or vaccination. Finally the cats are returned to their original territory. Whenever possible, any kittens less than eight weeks old and stray pet cats can be removed from the group and put up for adoption.

The group will continue to be monitored, by a nominated caregiver and the organisation which is implementing the TNR programme. Cats will have access to appropriate food and shelter, new cats that join the group will be neutered, sick animals will be treated and any concerns that may arise in the community regarding the cats will be addressed.



The advantages of TNR

TNR offers a number of advantages for both the cats and the human community. It is essential to be informed about the different advantages and be able to explain them when necessary.

Neutering the cats provides the following advantages:

- **There will be no more litters of kittens and the population of cats will decrease over time**

If all the cats are neutered, and any newcomers to the group are quickly captured, neutered and returned or put up for adoption, the size of the colony will decrease.

- **Reduction of noise**

Much of the noise coming from unneutered cats occurs during mating and territorial disputes. These behaviours are greatly reduced, or even eliminated, once cats are neutered.

- **Reduction of smell**

Unneutered males mark territory with urine, which has an especially strong and unpleasant odour. Castrated males will mark the territory far less.

- **Rodent control is maintained**

Cats are a natural and very effective method of rodent control. Returning the cats to their territory will allow this to continue.

- **Healthier and less visible cats**

Neutering, appropriate feeding and providing adequate homing centre when necessary, substantially improves the health of the cats. Additionally, cats that are cared for have less tendency to wander off in search of food, making them less visible.

- **Reduction of sights that people find distressing**

People will no longer be confronted with the miserable scenarios of starving and sick cats or their dying offspring, which often have negative effects on tourism and the community.

- **Presence of a caregiver**

A TNR programme requires someone to be responsible for the monitoring and care of the cats.

- **Avoiding the creation of new unneutered groups of cats**

Removing most or all of the cats in a group without removing the food source leaves the territory free to be filled by other cats looking for food. Other unneutered cats may take the place of the previous ones and all the old problems will return. Neutering the entire group and leaving the cats in their familiar territory will potentially deter others. However, street cats do not exist in isolation, and effective TNR programmes include wider initiatives that include campaigns to encourage neutering of pets, free or low-cost neutering of animals that live in low income

households, deterrent and punishment of abandonment, incentivisation of responsible ownership, and the demystification of certain popular beliefs (e.g. that the females should have at least one litter before they are spayed, or that males become unhappy if they are neutered).

- **Fewer street and stray pet cats throughout the entire community**

Studies show that when 70% of street cats in a given geographical area are neutered, births decrease and the population stabilises. Above 70%, the population begins to decrease, drastically as 100% neutering is reached. It is worth noting that the population reduction due to disease may slow with the improved cat welfare following neutering, vaccination etc.

- **Less culling (catching and killing of cats)**

Less cats in the community due to TNR results in less culling by the official collection centres in countries where it is still allowed, for two reasons: firstly, there are less requests for capture of feral and street cats; and secondly, having fewer stray kittens born leaves more room in the homing centres and foster homes for abandoned or lost pet cats.

- **Fewer complaints to the municipal services**

TNR programmes lead to the reduction in nuisances to the community (for example, loud caterwauling/howling, fighting, territory marking, damage to private property, and unpleasant odours) and therefore reduction in complaints to municipal services.

- **Greater collaboration with caregivers**

Local caregivers know the whereabouts, habits, and numbers of the cats and they are the ones that can manage the feeding to facilitate trapping. The TNR method is greatly appreciated by the caregivers, as it causes no harm to the cats, while the activities of culling creates resistance and lack of cooperation.

- **Mobilising volunteer action**

TNR attracts a considerable number of volunteers who are essential for a successful TNR programme.

- **Reducing costs**

The average cost of capturing, temporary holding, killing and disposing of one cat is much higher than the cost of its neutering.

- **Public relations benefits for the municipal services**

If the municipal services support TNR programmes their public image improves. This will potentially result in more volunteers, more people going to official collection centres to adopt animals, and a greater response to funding appeals.



Failed alternatives to TNR

One of the main reasons to promote TNR is that nothing else works. Whether the intention is to reduce cat populations or reduce nuisance complaints, no other technique has so far proven to be successful in the long term. This becomes clearer when we examine the alternatives.

Capturing and killing

Capturing street cats, transporting them to an animal homing centre and killing them can, in the short term, decrease the cat population in a given location.

However, this reduction is only temporary and the population will soon be back in full force. There are several reasons why this happens:

- **The vacuum effect**

"The vacuum effect", was documented for the first time by the biologist Roger Tabor, in his studies of the street cats of London (Tabor, Roger, *The Stray Life of the Domestic Cat*, 1983).

Groups of cats form because food and shelter necessary for their survival are available. When cats are removed from a location, but the environment does not change, unneutered cats from neighbouring areas will, sooner or later, begin to occupy the now vacant habitat in order to take advantage of the resources that remain. Removing the food source to alter the environment is, in practice, difficult to achieve. An open trash bin, easily accessible garbage bags or people who actively feed, are common food sources that can be difficult to control. It is virtually impossible to prevent caregivers from feeding the cats. It has been shown that, despite the risk of the legal consequences that exist in some countries, people who care about animals will continue to feed them.

- **Lack of resources of the municipal services**

Few official collection centres have the resources to capture all street cats living within their area. In big counties, for example, where there are few workers and the street cat populations can be as high as tens of thousands, capturing and killing is not even a viable option.

- **Excessive reproduction**

When only a few cats are captured leaving others behind, the remaining cats will have less competition for food and shelter, resulting in higher numbers of kittens until the previous population level is reached.

These factors (that is the vacuum effect, lack of resources from municipal services and excessive reproduction), make the “catching and killing” method totally ineffective when compared with TNR. The only thing achieved is a rotation of the population – different cats, but certainly no reduction in numbers.

Stop feeding

At first sight, this method is attractive due to its simplicity – do not feed the cats and they will go away. Instead of leaving the area, they tend initially to move closer to human homes as they become hungrier. In addition, an undernourished cat can still reproduce (but kittens are less likely to survive) . Depriving cats of food will result only in hungry and unhealthy animals, vulnerable to disease and parasitic infestation. Also, as previously mentioned, it is almost impossible to stop animal lovers from feeding street cats, especially when they see cats that are starving.

Trapping and rehoming/relocating

The idea of collecting all the existing street cats and keeping them in foster homes until they are adopted is completely unrealistic. The majority of these cats are not suitable to be pet cats and would not be able to tolerate living with people. Also, there are simply far more cats than families willing to adopt them. It is better to make the best use of limited resources to neuter cats than go through the impossible and damaging process of attempting to socialise them. Furthermore, we must keep in mind that, for the welfare of a feral or street cat, letting it live in freedom is a far better choice than keeping it caged up for years, or conditioning it to live hiding and scared for the rest of its life.

Relocating feral or street cats to a safer place or a homing centre/sanctuary is a solution supported by many people. However, those homing centres that do exist are consistently overcrowded and offer poor living conditions.

Additionally, trying to move a group of cats requires finding a new suitable location and people willing to commit to care for them. It also requires confinement in the early stages to get them used to an unfamiliar territory and new source and location of food. Even if all this is done correctly, it is still possible that some percentage of cats will disappear. Group relocation also brings about the same problems as capture and killing. Removing the animals without changing the habitat (eliminating the source of food and shelter) results in a new group forming.

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Doing nothing

If nothing is done, the cat population will reach the largest size that the food and shelter availability will accommodate. When capacity of those resources is exceeded, natural population control comes in the form of disease and death.

Simply removing the cats from their territory, whether killing them, relocating them or taking them to a homing centre, decreases the number of animals in the short-term but does not solve the problem in the long-term.



Implementing a TNR Programme

If implemented correctly, TNR is not limited to the capture and neutering of cats – it also includes the creation of a safe and healthy environment for animals and people. Thus, the implementation of a TNR programme should also include the creation of feeding points, good winter shelter (when necessary) and community engagement to promote a more harmonious relationship within the neighbourhood.

All groups of cats will have specific challenges that require creative solutions. The process described here should be seen as a general guide to be adapted according to the needs of each situation.

Note that the trapping occurs at the end of the process, not at the beginning. Not all problems can be anticipated or avoided, but most of them can.



Before starting a TNR programme

Before you start a TNR programme you should consider the following aspects:

- **Do you intend to work alone or in a group?**

It is important to reflect on whether you intend to implement a TNR project alone or whether it is possible to volunteer with the local official collection centres or join a group that already operates in the area. It is important to communicate and establish good relations with other people/groups that also develop TNR initiatives in your area, so you can help each other and share information about the animals.

If you prefer to act alone, because you feel uncomfortable dealing with other people, it is possible that this type of work is not right for you. To carry out a successful TNR programme, it is essential to communicate with many people: with the official services that will have to authorise your intervention, with the caregivers of the cats, the local population, the authorities, the vets, etc. In fact, you are likely to interact more with people than with cats.

This work involves many hours: trips to the clinics, post-operative management of complicated cases, legal problems and emergencies that may arise, not to mention fundraising! If you decide to move forward with a small group or with limited resources, it will be more effective to focus on a small area and a small number of cats, than try to cover a more extended area.



- **Do you have the available time?**

Before you begin, it is also important to consider objectively your available time. Each capture can take several hours so that you can capture all or at least the vast majority of cats in a group. If you can only spend 30 minutes at a time trapping, it is very likely that most cats will learn to be afraid of the trap before you are able to capture them all.

Also, it is essential to avoid getting involved in more groups of cats than you have the capacity to complete in a short amount of time: **starting and finishing one group at a time is more efficient than starting several at the same time**, which results in all of them remaining unfinished for months. Never start a new group without having finished the previous one. It may seem more appealing to start a new group where you can capture 10 or 12 cats at once, than spending hours trying to trap the last female of another. But, if this female is not captured, that group will soon be out of control again and all the investment made in it will have been in vain. Focus on your goals and stay determined. Since it is likely that the TNR will occupy a significant part of your free time, the support and understanding of your family and friends is critical.

- **Do you have the funds?**

Before you begin, you must make an estimated budget and plan ways to raise funds. Creating a team with its own identity or a legally constituted association will make it easier to get support for your projects.

- **Do you have physical and psychological resilience?**

Trapping is done all year, sometimes under adverse weather conditions. Additionally, you may have to witness sick or injured animals and provide them with the assistance needed. This requires good health and emotional wellbeing to cope with the associated stress. Life events can threaten to sabotage your plans, so when deciding to implement a TNR programme you will need to ensure that animals continue to be cared for regardless of any personal crisis.

- **Have you considered the safety of your volunteers?**

It is necessary to ensure the safety and wellbeing of volunteers. They should have a tetanus vaccination and must wash their hands thoroughly after work. Pregnant women and people with immunosuppressive conditions should not work in direct contact with cats. If the volunteer is bitten or scratched they should immediately wash the affected area with soap and water or with an antiseptic solution. Bites from cats can be very serious as they can cause bacterial infections and may require treatment and prescribed antibiotics. If bitten by a cat, the volunteer must seek medical attention.

- **Have you created the necessary policies and procedures?**

You need to determine, in writing, the standards for:

1. Recruitment of volunteers;
2. Compliance with applicable legislation;
3. Revenue and expenditure;
4. Reimbursement of expenses to volunteers;
5. Payments to veterinary clinics;
6. Collaboration with other organisations and entities;
7. Foster care and adoption;
8. Relocation;
9. Press contacts;
10. Health and safety;
11. Euthanasia policy;
12. Testing for feline infectious diseases (eg: FIV and FeLV);
13. Sterilisation of pregnant cats;
14. Timing of neutering.

Even if you are not a legally constituted organisation, it is quite useful to define with accuracy your policies and procedures, as well as your vision and mission. Otherwise, it will be easy to deviate from the initial objective and it will be more difficult to deal with problems that may arise.

- **Do you already have protocols with veterinarians?**

The availability of free neutering through official services, and the collaboration of at least one veterinarian who offers neutering and treatments at reduced prices, is crucial for the implementation of a TNR project. The collaboration should be beneficial to both parties and based on mutual respect and trust and should be maintained in the long-term.

Before starting your work, it is recommended that you draw up the protocol of collaboration with the veterinarian, listing all procedures to implement (making appointments, costs, tipping the ear, flank or midline technique, antibiotics, sutures, deworming, treatments, tests, vaccinations, microchips, etc). It is important that the veterinarian understands and agrees rules and policies with the TNR organisation regarding FIV/FeLV testing, euthanasia, paediatric neutering, and sterilisation of pregnant cats, etc.

It is also essential that the veterinarian is flexible in the management of appointments and understands that it will not always be possible to trap the exact number of cats

scheduled for a certain day. On the other hand, the TNR organisation must strive to capture the scheduled number of cats. The TNR organisation should respect the technical and scientific opinions of veterinarians, and they, in return, should also acknowledge the expertise and experience of the TNR organisation.

- **Have you thought about how you will motivate your volunteers?**

It can be difficult to motivate volunteers, especially when the initial enthusiasm fades. It is important that volunteers feel happy and appreciated for their contribution.

Some forms of motivation are:

1. Promoting social gatherings;
2. Organising training courses for volunteers with delivery of participation certificates;
3. Scheduling regular volunteer meetings, to exchange experiences and ask questions;
4. Sending regular newsletters related to the activities of the organisation;
5. Defining clear organisational policies and listening to volunteers' suggestions.



Starting a TNR programme

Step 1: Create good relationships with the community

Most of the cats are part of a community. Whether in a yard, a parking lot, a factory, or in an alley behind a building, cats have human neighbours. The effectiveness of the TNR method and the safety of cats will depend, in large part, on the understanding and cooperation of the people who live and work in that area. It is therefore important to inform them about TNR, hear them and take their concerns into account.

Some people appreciate the presence of cats and feed them, while others feel uncomfortable with the noise and smells of unneutered cats. Not everyone knows that there is something that can be done to improve the situation, both for the cats and the community in which they live, and many will be receptive to the TNR programme once they understand it and may even decide to help. Most of the people who oppose the presence of animals on their property become more tolerant after the implementation of a TNR programme. Furthermore, you can find some solutions on the market to keep the animals away from their gardens and backyards, for example motion-activated sprinklers, natural repellents and ultrasound devices. Starting the work without including the neighbourhood, is putting the animals and the project at unnecessary risk.

What can be considered a community varies depending on the location and circumstances. It could be a factory and the people who work there, a municipal building, the owner of a house and its backyard, a gated community, a hospital, a neighbourhood or even a whole city. Whatever the definition of community and its size, the importance of developing good relations is crucial. For example, it is much easier to capture the cats if you have permission to enter private property.

The feeding and providing care processes are also made easier when there is support from the community; without it, you run the risk of seeing your activities sabotaged.

By implementing the TNR method, you are helping to control a problem that affects all those who live or work near the cats. The TNR programme is a form of community service.

- **Deal calmly with any hostility and resistance**

Often a problem related to street cats only comes to your attention when there is already a crisis situation, for example there are too many cats, people can't sleep because of the meowing and fighting, they are fed up with the accumulation of food containers and leftovers in the streets, backyards that cannot be used due to the smell, etc. These are typical signs of a cat population that is out of control. Most of the people affected by these problems will have a grudge against the cats and blame whoever feeds them. The attitude of these people can be, at first, hostile and adversarial.

Anticipating this type of scenario and knowing how to handle it is of paramount importance, especially when it is necessary to have a dialogue with someone who has the authority to prevent or authorise the implementation of a TNR project.

The key is not to interpret the hostility as a personal attack, and not to react aggressively, even though it may be hard not to respond in kind. Try to understand the position of someone who may feel frustrated and dissatisfied with the nuisance being caused by the presence of unneutered cats, especially if no one has ever taken their complaints seriously or has offered a workable solution.

Show understanding towards the raised concerns and explain how a TNR programme will help and why removing the cats permanently from the area will only bring new cats and the same problems as before.

Most people respond favourably when they see that their concerns are being considered and, when they understand that there is a way to keep the cats but get rid of the problems, most of them are willing to try.

If the cats are located in the yard of an apartment building, make an appointment with the administration of the condominium. If it's a public building, find out who the people are who can authorise the implementation of the programme and propose a meeting. If you are trying to communicate with the whole neighbourhood, schedule the meeting at a cafe nearby or in a room provided by the local council. Invite all interested parties to participate, whether they are for or against the presence of the animals. If you can get those who are hostile to show up as well, you will have the opportunity to change their minds. Distribute a pamphlet with clear and succinct information, describing TNR and how you propose to implement it in the neighbourhood. Try to get support from recognised leaders within the community.

Sometimes, when cats are out of control and in a crisis, there are threats of poisoning. In many countries, poisoning animals is illegal. If you find poison or dead cats suspected of being poisoned, contact the authorities immediately. In order to be considered as evidence, the corpses and poison should only be handled by the authorities. Always ask for a complaint number to be able to follow progress. If you don't know who is poisoning the animals, it may be useful to create an informational poster explaining that poisoning animals is illegal and punishable by law and asking for information regarding the identity of the perpetrator to prevent future poisonings.



- **Contribute to improve the municipal regulations and animal control policies**
You will encounter people in positions of authority who will oppose the TNR programme. Try asking other people who may have influence to intervene, such as the representatives of animal welfare organisations or the president of the local council. If, even so, you are still unable to move forward, keep the lines of communication open. If, eventually, the person or entity tries other methods to solve the problem and these fail, they may be more receptive to the TNR solution. Presenting the TNR method effectively at this level requires some experience. If you are just beginning, ask for advice from more experienced animal welfare associations before meeting with the president of the local council or city hall, or with those responsible for the official collection centres, such as the municipal veterinarian or the councillor of the respective department area.

In some places there are regulations that prohibit people from feeding animals in public spaces. In others, the municipal services have the policy to capture and remove any animal that roams the streets, neutered or not. In order to implement a successful TNR programme in these communities, these laws and regulations may need to be changed but this takes time and organisation.

Step 2: Create food and shelter locations and establish a regular feeding pattern

Establishing a regular feeding schedule will improve the health of cats and leave them better prepared for the stress of capture and surgery. Dry, warm shelters, especially during harsh winters, are also important to maintain the health of animals.

A suitable, well maintained feeding point (and/or a shelter) can also help reduce tensions with neighbours.

The cats should be fed at the same time and in the same place at least two weeks before the capture. Establishing a set feeding pattern will help you get to know the group of cats. How many cats are there? What is their state of health? Are any cats friendly and therefore adoptable? Knowing all this in advance gives you time to secure vacancies in the veterinary services, to discuss with temporary foster families, and to know specifically what your options are for action.

A pattern of consistent feeding will also make trapping much easier, because you will have accustomed the cats to appear in the right place at the right time.



While you are establishing a feeding time pattern, try to count the number of cats within the group. Take notes and pictures. Having a very approximate idea of the number of cats is important to schedule the surgeries and gather the necessary material.

Don't rely on the word of third parties about the number of existing cats. Most people tend to over or underestimate the numbers. The same group of cats can also be counted multiple times in different locations (as they may have more than one feeding place) and some cats may be difficult to distinguish from one another. Only by observing the group closely for a week or two will you be able to determine the closest possible estimate of numbers.

In addition to counting the members of the colony, see if there are any adoptable cats (kittens that can still be socialised or docile adults). If there are, try to find them a home or a foster one.

If any of the cats look injured or sick (very thin, congested eyes or nose, coughing or an unkempt appearance), anticipate the need of preparing a cage for them if there is likely to be extended veterinary treatments.

Often, when several members of a colony appear in poor health, they may have upper respiratory tract infections. Improving the quality of their diet can have a huge impact on their general health. Making sure they have a warm and dry place to shelter in the winter also helps, especially in climates with harsher winters. These changes should be made before the date of capture so that the general state of health of the animals improves before the surgeries.

Step 3: Set up a containment area

During the capture and postoperative period, the cats will need to be confined in a place with no access from strangers. For safety reasons and to prevent escape, the cats should stay in the traps or carriers (or transferred to hospital cages), which should be totally covered, except during the surgical procedure itself. The confinement time is usually between 24 and 48 hours, in a cool, dry, ventilated and safe space.

Where there are particularly shy cats in the colony that are difficult to trap it may be necessary to wait until all cats are trapped before returning any, which can take several days. As the trapping continues, those kept confined on the day and night of the trapping will have to remain for 24 to 48 hours after surgery. It would however be preferable under these circumstances to plan strategically at the outset to increase

daily capacity for trapping and neutering (to include equipment and surgical time), possibly with the assistance of several veterinary clinics on the same day.

The containment area should be mild, dry, ventilated and safe. During this process cats cannot move or cuddle with their companions so if the chosen area is too cold, the animals may become hypothermic. The cats' body temperature drops during surgery and won't return to normal until they have fully recovered from anaesthesia. The space should be protected from the elements (rain, snow or direct sunlight) and accessible only to people involved in the TNR project and therefore off limits to strangers or other animals.

Examples of possible containment areas are: a garage, a basement, an empty room, a storage room, a bathroom or a protected terrace. Many people fear that the cats may be noisy. However, street and feral cats confined are very quiet, as they are trying to remain as invisible as possible. Very rarely you may come across a cat that will meow softly and the rest of the cats will join in, but this is rare, as most of the time cats will remain silent and still. If a cat meows a lot it is very likely that it is an abandoned pet cat that is trying to get your attention, not a feral or street cat.

If you are going to keep the cats in a part of your home, you must keep your own pets away from them in order to avoid any risk of transmittable diseases. It is also essential that your own cats are vaccinated.

Step 4: Reserving the surgery time and obtaining the necessary equipment and transport

The number of cats that will be operated at a given time will depend on the time and money that you have available, the availability of veterinarians, the number of traps and carriers and the size of the containment area. Transportation to and from the vet must also be arranged.

Always try to have two or three extra traps/carriers for unexpected cats. It may also be useful to replace traps that have been urine-marked or even after trapping a very stressed cat that will toss and struggle inside the trap; in both cases, the pheromones will scare away other cats.

As soon as you have the approximate number of cats and have a confinement area, you can proceed with making the appointments for surgery and organizing the transportation to and from the clinic. While driving, keep the traps/carriers covered, and the windows closed or only just slightly open (not more than 2 cm).

Step 5: Preparation for trapping

When you are ready to capture the cats, it will be much easier if they appear at a time and location most convenient for you, than having to spread traps over a large area and wait all day until the cats will appear. For at least two weeks prior to the capture, ask the caregiver for help to place the food in the same place and at the same time each day. If the cats are already used to appearing at a time of day that is not convenient for the capture, ask the caregiver to move it to the most appropriate time.

Food should be removed after feeding the animals, and not left available all day. Your efforts to create a routine will be ruined if the cats know they can eat at any time. If, for example, you cannot remove the food because some of the cats would not be able to eat, then create the habit of showing up to the feeding point every day at the same time with something tasty, like a can of tuna. Cats will learn that whenever you appear, you bring a special treat.

The animals should not be fed in the 24 hours prior to trapping. The number of days required to undertake the capture will depend on the number of cats. If the plan is to trap a considerable number of cats, it is advisable to allow two to three days for this step. This allows extra time for unforeseen events, such as adverse weather conditions, or for cats that, for some reason, don't show up on the first day.

Step 6: Neutering day

Food and water must be removed from the animals at least 6 hours (3 hours for kittens) before surgery, depending on the anaesthetic protocol used. The normal treatment includes a general check-up, neutering, the surgical removal of the tip of the left ear for identification purposes, worm and flea treatment, and, in some cases, vaccination, according to the amount of funding available and protocols.



Step 7: Recovery and return

Cats will need to be confined for 24 to 48 hours after surgery and are then returned to their territory. During this time the cats should be fed (except for the pre and postoperative fasting periods) and their traps/carriers cleaned twice a day.

Step 8: Care and long-term monitoring

Though the main work ends after the successful capturing, neutering and returning of the cats, the TNR programme is not finished. In order to ensure the long-term and sustainable success of the project, a caregiver must continue to feed and monitor the cats regularly.

Step 9: Keep accurate records

Even after the TNR programme is completed, each colony should have a record that must be constantly updated with the following information:

1. Start and end date of the TNR programme and the successive monitoring;
2. Number of cats neutered (males, females, kittens);
3. Number of cats adopted (specify kittens, docile adult cats);
4. Number of sick and injured cats (specify disease/injury and treatment, and if they were adopted or returned to the colony);
5. Number of cats euthanized (and why);
6. Number of cats that disappeared from the site;
7. Number of cats that have been found dead (and their causes of death, if known);
8. Number of new cats who have joined, or have been abandoned at the colony, specifying if they were adopted, or neutered and returned;
9. Caregiver contact details.



Any other relevant events in the colony (changes in the site, such as new buildings or constructions, the building of a homing centre for the cats, changes regarding feeding, any re-homing, etc...).

This record is essential not only for the control of the colony but, above all, to demonstrate the effectiveness of TNR. Only then will it be possible to prove to the authorities and the general public that the TNR method is the only effective way to control street cat populations. In order to carry out serious studies on the subject, rigorous data and figures are needed, which only colony caregivers and the TNR organizations that carry out their work in a professional manner can provide. Regular contact with the caregivers is essential for maintaining up-to-date records.



Decide how you want to do trapping

Advantages of mass trapping

Trapping a whole colony at once is always preferable to a gradual or phased capture. The situation in the field is often urgent due to the large number of cats and their offspring, disgruntled neighbours, and/or threats to the lives of the animals. Neutering the entire colony all at once solves the crisis quickly; the noise and odours dramatically decrease and the birth of more kittens is prevented.

The likelihood of getting all members of the colony trapped increases significantly with a mass capture. If you only catch one cat at a time, you will have difficulty in capturing the last ones as they will be mixed in with cats already neutered and returned. In a mass trapping, capturing the last cats means that these will be the only ones present on the site, in addition to being hungrier as the trapping process continues.

In the long run, mass trapping requires less work. It is more intensive in preparation: finding a suitable confinement space, caring for the cats during the postoperative period, transporting them to the clinic, etc. These efforts must be repeated continuously in the case of a gradual capture.

The more days of trapping you make, the more likely it is that the cats will learn to fear and avoid the traps.

That said, human, logistical and financial resources do not always allow for mass capture. In these cases, the goal becomes to capture and sterilise as many cats as possible at once.

Finally, we advise that trapping is carried out by teams of at least two people, especially if you are going to capture several cats. You may need to pay attention to more than one cat or trap. If you are transferring the captured cats to carriers, it is also important to have the help of another person to make the transfers. However, do not take more help than necessary: many strangers around the colony can make cats more cautious.

Decide how you want to do trapping

Manual trapping

Manual trapping is an effective and flexible process: effective because it allows you to capture more than one cat at a time or capture a specific cat when the rest of the colony is already neutered; flexible because it is the volunteer who decides when and how to capture the cats. Trapping of a cat that is especially jumpy or suspicious, sick or injured cats, or pregnant cats, can be prioritised over the rest of the colony. Cats that calmly enter and eat inside the trap will easily return so you can always catch them later. Manual capture should be used in most situations. The automatic lever traps should only be used if the location of the capture does not allow for manual trigger trap use.

- ***The advantages of a manual trap are:***

1. Better control of the entire process;
2. Capturing exactly the animal you want;
3. Being able to set priorities;
4. Avoiding capture of already neutered cats;
5. The trap does not need to be trigger lever activated;
6. More than one cat can be captured at once which reduces the number of trapping days;
7. There are no mechanisms that can break down;
8. Rapid capture of the entire colony;
9. Cats that enter the trap together will be safe together (or can easily be separated);
10. Can give immediate attention to the captured cat and reduce the animal's stress time;
11. It lets cats see other cats go into the trap, eat and leave without anything happening to them;
12. It reduces the number of capture routines.

- ***How many cats per trap?***

One of the main advantages of using a manual trap is that it allows you to capture more than one cat at a time. However, it is advisable to transfer them individually to carriers, except in the case of offspring and juveniles, which can be transferred together to comfort themselves and reduce the stress of capture. In that case, provide veterinary services with sufficient carriers for each cat to be placed on an individual carrier after surgery. Particular care is needed when adult cats are captured together with offspring, as they may accidentally injure them when the trap is activated.

The more cats that you can capture at once, the fewer times you will need to set up the trap, reducing the likelihood that cats will learn to fear it. This also speeds up the whole process.

Remember: even if you accidentally capture a neutered cat along with a non-neutered one, you can always free the neutered cat after the non-neutered cat is transferred to the carrier.



- ***Dealing with people while using a manual trap***

Trapping street cats is an activity that does not go unnoticed. The caregivers or bystanders may try to offer you advice while you are trapping but most people don't understand the process and the reasons why you didn't pull the string when the first cat walked into the trap. Whoever controls the trap is the person who holds the string and it is their responsibility to carry out a capture as effectively as possible.

Unfortunately, the onlookers and passers-by have the tendency to approach at crucial times and, inadvertently, disturb the capture. It is important to deal with these people in a comprehensive and patient manner and explain what you're doing. Giving a clear explanation can be rewarding, since the person concerned will be able to enlighten others about the TNR in the future.

If you encounter people who are unable to understand what you're doing and continue to disrupt the capture, you must remain steadfast and calm and, if necessary, call the appropriate police authorities.

- **Winter captures**

Trapping in the winter months has many advantages: fewer pregnant females and fewer nursing cats and kittens. In addition, we are ahead of the mating season and thus prevent births of litters in the spring. Even in colder climates, the females shaved fur for surgery won't cause them to get sick if they have adequate shelter. In mild climate countries this is not even an issue.



The Capture

- *Capture consists of a five-step process:*

1. The cat approaches and investigates the trap;
2. The cat reaches the bait and eats it;
3. The cat is caught and reacts by trying to escape or showing signs of restlessness;
4. The trapper enters the area, covers the trap, transfer the cat to the carrier;
5. The trapper rearms the trap.

This routine will be observed by the cats that are in the vicinity. Cats learn quickly from experience, so exposure to negative stimuli must be limited to a minimum. If a cat sees a colony member enter the trap, eat and leave, it will be encouraged to also investigate the trap. In manual capture this is what happens, since it is the person who controls when the door will close.



The Capture

Recommended equipment

- ***Traps***

Traps can be operated manually or automatically and are essentially rectangular boxes and work by getting the cat through the front door at one end, in order to reach the bait at the opposite end. As the cat walks towards the bait, it will step on a lever that closes the door and locks it, preventing it from leaving but without hurting it. It is important that traps have the following characteristics:

1. A sliding rear door that opens by guillotine system (a door which slides down);
2. Length of about 90 cm;
3. A trigger lever that is sensitive enough for kittens;
4. Design and materials that allow for easy cleaning and disinfection;
5. A solid and secure structure, able to withstand the escape attempts of large and strong cats;
6. A sturdy handle that allows easy transport;
7. A door that shuts quickly, firmly, and as quietly as possible, with no risk to the cat.

A rear sliding door is required in order to feed the cat and clean the trap if it is also going to be used as a cage. The rear opening is also important in order to transfer the cat out safely into a carrier or cage. It is also safer to release a neutered cat by opening the sliding rear door. The trap must be about 90 cm long in order to serve as a cage for the cat before and after neutering. If it is smaller, it will be difficult to feed the cat and keep the area clean. A trap larger than 90 cm is unnecessary as it can be too bulky and heavy.

The traps that Associação Animais de Rua use and recommend are listed here:

- ***MDC Eezicatch Cat Trap***

This trap has the advantage of having a sliding rear door made of transparent acrylic that gives the cat the illusion of having an escape route. This door also facilitates transferring the cat to a carrier, cleaning, and feeding it when the trap is used as a cage.

The lever itself is made of wire mesh, which allows for a small amount of bait to be placed underneath it (in a way that still allows the mechanism to be triggered), forcing cats that are more difficult to capture to step on the mechanism to try to get to the bait, when it is being used in automatic mode.

There are cats that enter into mesh-floored traps more easily because the floor can be camouflaged especially if the trap is placed on grass or other vegetation. Other cats

don't like stepping on the mesh and enter more easily into traps with a smooth floor.



- **Drop Trap**

A drop trap is literally that –the cat passes under a suspended trap which drops down over it. The cat is not forced to enter a tight and confined space. Consequently, many of the cats that avoid a normal trap will enter this one, which makes this a very useful tool. It can be used as the main type of trap to capture the entire colony, or just to capture the leftover cats that didn't enter the common types of traps.



- ***MDC Multi Cat Trap***

This is a large manual trap, capable of catching six or more cats at a time. Although it is big, heavy and difficult to transport and handle, it is extremely useful for capturing large colonies, to capture a female with her kittens, or to catch a nervous cat that won't enter the smaller sized trap out of fear of confinement in the smaller space.



No trap is perfect; all have their pros and cons. Choosing the most suitable trap for you will depend on your budget, the specifics of each colony, storage space, the number of cats that need to be captured and your personal preferences. Patience is a virtue is the golden rule for manual trapping. This process is effective but can be time consuming and steps cannot be eliminated. Never use abrupt or violent methods to try to force the animals into the traps.

- ***Carriers***

Carrier and trap entrances must have the same dimension (height and width). The doors of the carriers must be fully detachable, otherwise it will not be possible to transfer the cats safely. The door must be easily inserted vertically. The lateral fittings should be sturdy and must not be easy to loosen (choose the ones with large plastic fittings, instead of the side pin system). Associação Animais de Rua prefers the Ferplast brand carriers (Atlas 20 model), as they meet all the specifications mentioned above. Alternatively, we also recommend MDC brand carriers that have a door and guillotine for transfer. As disadvantages of this equipment, we point out the mesh base, which is less comfortable for the animal, allows urine to leak out, and the fact that it cannot be dismantled.



- ***Restraint cages***

A restraint cage allows you to limit the cat's freedom of movement, by restricting it to a minimal space. It is mostly used to anaesthetise street and feral cats without the need to handle them directly. The cage contains a movable internal partition that moves along its length and must also have a sliding door at one end to allow the direct transfer of the animal. It is also important that the cage has a safety edge to keep the sliding door shut properly. Unfortunately, many veterinary clinics have restraint cages that do not include the sliding door, which make the transfer process very difficult.



The Capture

Trapping essentials

Here is a basic list of items you will need when you go trapping:

- Traps (2 or 3 are sufficient for a colony of 20 or more cats)
- Cat Trap comb (optional);



- Carriers;
- Bait that is easily discarded - We recommend two types of bait because some cats may have a marked preference for one. Canned tuna is usually used, but it should be supplemented with other very aromatic wet food to attract the few cats that don't appreciate tuna. Other suggestions include grilled chicken, canned sardines, mackerel, sausage, ham, hamburgers, steamed fish and catnip. Fish that is still warm (but not so hot that it can burn) better releases its aroma, and is usually an irresistible snack even for the most difficult cats. Chicken and sausage also allow for better results if they are still warm. For reasons of hygiene and ease of cleaning, the bait can be placed on sheets of paper or newspaper. Rigid bowls should not be used inside the trap, since they pose a risk to the cats once the trap is triggered and can interfere with the trigger lever mechanism;
- Can opener (if necessary);
- Forks or spoons;
- Duct tape;
- Plastic sheeting to line the car or large plastic bags (if transporting cats in traps or in wire grid-based carriers);

- Pieces of cloth or towels large enough to fully cover the carrier or trap (one per trap/ carrier) to cover the trap after the cat has been captured, when transferring to a carrier and when transporting the cat to be released. They are essential as being covered keeps the cats calm, which reduces the chance of them hurting themselves;
- Newspaper to line the carriers;
- Pocket flashlight;
- Some kind of lubricant for the trap mechanism (if required);
- First-aid kit - Clean a wound caused by a cat immediately to help prevent more serious infection later;
- Pens or pencils;
- Tags/labels and log sheets to record information of each colony and cat captured;
- Notepad;
- Gloves;
- Wet wipes and tissues;
- 1 litre bottle filled with sand or water (for manual trapping);
- String (several rolls) and the traps' remote control, if available. Even if using a remote, take string in case it breaks down or runs out of battery;
- Pocket knife;
- Binoculars;
- Sunglasses;
- Comfortable shoes (that don't make noise);
- Smartphone or digital camera to record images and video of the site, cats and the captures;
- Cable ties to lock cages or traps shut to prevent cats accidentally escaping.

The Capture

Identifying and caring for the equipment

It is essential to identify and mark all capture materials with the name of the organisation, number assigned to the equipment and a contact, especially if the material is used by several people or rented/borrowed by the public. Keep a record stating the date of the loan or requisition, the identification and contact details of the person to whom the material was delivered and the date of return. It is also advisable to establish a security value in the case of loans to the public. Whenever you lend out a trap, teach the person who is going to use it to operate it properly and make sure they understand all the essential aspects of the capture, so that no animal is ever put at risk.

Traps, carriers and cages must be thoroughly disinfected after each use, in order to avoid the spread of diseases among cats. Also, the smell of urine or pheromones from the previously captured cats may discourage other cats from approaching the trap. Avoid using detergents with strong smells (ammonia, citrus or other), as well as bleach, which has a similar smell to territory-marking urine and can scare the cats away. Ideally, use a specific, medical grade, disinfectant (such as Limoseptic or Virkon). As with any product, always rinse thoroughly to eliminate the smell of the product.

Check traps and practise using them

Practice using the traps before you start capturing. The best time to do this is when you purchase or borrow them – so that you can ask questions about how it works. If you do not know how to use the traps, read the manufacturer's instructions, ask a welfare association or an experienced person in TNR programmes for help.

Test each trap by arming the trigger, and then pressing the lever, on the side, by hand. The front door should close easily as soon as the lever is pressed. Also, practice triggering the trap manually.

It is very important to practise how to use a manual trap until you feel you have sufficient confidence and dexterity to begin capturing. You need to learn how to:

1. Set the trap correctly and quickly;
2. Position the trap and the string correctly;
3. Activate the trap with just a single movement of the string;
4. Transfer the cats safely to carrier(s).

The Capture

Making the process work

Cats have a natural distrust of new or unknown objects which can be caused by one of four reasons:

1. The cat does not enter the trap simply because it is unfamiliar. This may change over time as the animal gets used to the presence of the trap;
2. There is something about the trap itself that discourages the entry (for example, it has been placed on an uneven surface, or it smells of the pheromones of cats previously captured);
3. The cat has seen other cats being captured and now has a negative association with the trap;
4. The cat has previously been captured using a trap;
5. There are ways to alleviate this mistrust of traps, applicable both in a manual trap and in automatic trap;
6. Let the cats familiarise themselves with the trap before you start the capture process (e.g. feeding the cats in some unarmed traps at the feeding point for a few days before the capture);
7. Ensure the traps are thoroughly cleaned between captures and/or take an extra trap;
8. Make sure the trap is properly positioned and isn't unstable.



- ***Allow enough time for the trapping (minimum three days)***

As a rule, if the preparations have been carefully made, on the first day you will catch all or the vast majority of the cats. The second day usually results in trapping all the remaining cats, but sometimes you may need to prolong the fast for a third day. That's why we suggest these three days to trap colonies of ten or more cats. You should never plan captures within less than two days: it may rain; someone may feed the colony the night before; some cats may not enter the traps or even appear, or there can be other unexpected events that may interfere with the process.

- ***Remove the food at least 24 hours before capturing***

Most street cats don't feel comfortable entering an unknown and confined space. Hunger is the key factor in motivating them to get into a trap. You may have prepared everything perfectly, but if the cats aren't hungry, most will not enter a trap, no matter how tempting the bait is. You should ask the caregiver to remove the food the day before trapping. For example, if the trapping starts on a Friday, then the cats should be fed normally on Wednesday and have no access to any kind of food on Thursday. The only exceptions to this rule are kittens, queens that are nursing kittens and cats that are clearly sick. If you can feed them separately and do not let the other cats get to the food, then they can eat the day before the catch, but not the day. If you are not able to feed these separately, then remove all the food the day before.

Removing the food is often more difficult for the caregiver than it is for the cats. Cats won't be happy to go without their daily meal, but it is important to bear in mind that adult cats can go without food for several days. A day of discomfort for the cat is a small price to pay for the significant improvement in its quality of life. Throughout the process, you must make sure fresh water is always available. Continue withholding food during the entire capture routine. It is essential to communicate with all the colony caregivers so that everyone is cooperating. You may encounter someone who refuses to cooperate and continues to feed the colony, regardless of having been informed of benefits of neutering cats. If this happens, try to work around the problem, removing the food or starting the trapping before feeding time. Sometimes cats will have access to food sources that you cannot control – hunting, scavenging for example. In these situations, you will need highly tempting food to lure these cats into traps.

- ***Careful placement of traps***

When you arrive at the colony, unload all the traps and place them in a way to cover as much of the feeding area and the path the cats usually take to get there, as well as other nearby sites. Avoid placing the traps in an open space. Instead, put them next to a wall, a fence, the front bumper of a car, a bush, etc. That way the trap will appear to be part of the environment that cats already know and will seem less threatening to them.

Make sure that the floor below the trap is even. Never place the trap on a ledge, narrow wall, sloping roof or in any location where it may slide off or fall and cause injury to the cat or allow it to escape. Keep the traps a few meters away from each other, so when you trigger one of the traps, you don't scare the cats that are inside or close to the other.

It is important that the trap is positioned so that you can see the cats that are approaching and those that are inside.

If a cat is not sufficiently inside the trap, he can block the door from closing and escape when you trigger it. If you cannot see the surrounding space, you may pull the string too soon, frightening away the animal. If you are trapping at night, make sure that there is enough light around the trap to get a good look at the cat, but not so much that it makes the cat feel vulnerable. Sometimes you can take advantage of the spotlight created by a streetlamp or the security light of a building.

Changing the location of the trap may encourage other cats to enter, but in that case, you should remove any pieces of bait that have fallen from the trap at its previous location, so that they do not distract the cats.

The Capture

Correct set up of traps

- *Using a Drop Trap*

Before arming the trap, place it on the ground and make sure that when it falls, there are no gaps between the frame and the ground that may allow the captured cats to escape.

1. Place the bait on newspaper and be sure to put enough food for several cats;
2. Place the food at the back of the trap and centred.

Wait until the cats are at the far end of the trap and have started eating before triggering it. If you wait too long, or if the cats suddenly become nervous and run out, don't worry: they will go back now that they know there is food. Don't make the mistake of dropping the trap before the cats are relaxed eating under it. If that happens, they may be frightened and not return. If two cats are eating and one is waiting just outside the trap, wait until all three are inside eating or until it goes away. Otherwise, you risk that the trap may fall on one of them.



- ***Using an automatic trap as a manual trap***

Automatic traps can be used as manual traps if the door opens outwards, as shown.



Don't set the automatic mechanism. Attach a string tightly around a one litre bottle filled with water. Open the front door of the trap and place a corner of the door on top of the bottle. Unroll the string until you find a comfortable distance and then stretch it on the ground. Make sure the bottle is stable and will not fall over accidentally.

Wait until the cats that you want to trap are completely inside the trap and have settled down to eat. Pull the string tightly, knocking over the bottle and closing the door. You should be able to trigger the door shut with a single pull on the string.

- ***Setting the traps***

Remove the back door. Place generous portions of two types of bait behind the trigger lever, against the bottom of the trap and close the back door. If the cat will be operated on in only a few hours, use less bait with an intense smell. Make a trail with small pieces of bait (or with the liquid from the can) from the entrance of the trap to the back, leading the animal to the trigger lever. Be careful not to put too much food on the trail so that the cat is not already full before reaching the end of the trap.

If the lever of the trap is mesh, you can put some small pieces of bait under it, but if you

are using the trap in automatic mode, be careful that the food does not prevent the lever from touching the floor when stepped on.



When putting the bait in a manual trap, place enough food for several cats. You may not want to capture the first cat or cats that entered, in which case there must be enough bait for several cats without disturbing them to add more bait. Once the trap is in position and the bait in place, open the front door and place the bottle or set the trigger for automatic trapping. Remove any obstacles that may prevent the door from closing completely.

On specific situations such as trying to trap a very timid cat or a cat that only appears during the night, it may be useful to set up a trap and leave it unattended for a few hours, which you should only do when you are sure that the trap is completely inaccessible to strangers, since the cats become completely vulnerable once trapped. In this case, you should cover the trap so that the animal does not feel exposed and overly stressed once trapped, avoiding injuries that can be serious, but leave both ends uncovered to reduce the sensation of confinement.

Apart from these specific situations, we do not cover the traps, because it reduces the trapper 's ability to see what is going on.

- **Using the string**

The string must be made of a heavy material, which when unrolled remains completely stretched and draws a clear and straight line, on the ground, between the trap and the person holding it. The string angle in relation to the trap needs to allow for a single pull to trigger the door shut and its angle of view must allow you to see the entire length of it in an unimpeded way.



Make sure that there is nothing in the way that could trap the string (such as branches, poles, etc.) and does not pass in a place where it can cause someone to trip and get hurt or accidentally trigger the trap. If there is a pole, a fence, or a car that can be used as a guide for the wire, so that it doesn't stay in a straight line, it can help you position the trap in order to have a better view. If you are using this technique, make sure that the string moves freely and won't get caught on anything. Check the string after each capture to ensure that it is not damaged, caught, tangled, or worn, as this may affect its function the next time you use it.

- ***Positioning the trapper***

It is important to position yourself at the capture site in order to remain unnoticed by the cats. You will need to keep a reasonable distance from the trap to allow cats to explore and enter the trap without fear.

You can use walls, bushes, fences or parked cars to hide from the cats' view while maintaining a good viewing angle of the trap. You can stay inside your car holding the string through the open window. A cat will be less likely to notice the presence of a person inside a vehicle.



You will have to keep an eye on the trap to know when it should be triggered, but at the same time you need to avoid direct eye contact with any cats that are inside, near or approaching it, as it is highly threatening to them. If a cat entering the trap looks at you and looks back at you, this can be interpreted as a warning not to enter the trap. If you are in a car (holding the string out the window), you can use the mirrors to monitor the trap and avoid looking directly at the animal. Wearing dark and non-reflecting sunglasses can also help.

The Capture

Choosing your cats

Don't immediately capture the first cat that enters the trap, as it is likely to come back later. In this way, it will allow the most suspicious cats to see the that first cat go in, eat, and come out without consequences, which will make them less afraid to enter. Let the cats get used to the trap before you start the capture process. Try to capture the females first, particularly the pregnant ones. Remember that tri colored cats are almost always females.

Look out for any cats that may be close to the trap, before triggering it. If another cat is watching the trap or approaching it, do not pull the string as you may scare it. If you wait, it may join the one already inside and thus you may capture both.

While the cats are approaching and feeding inside the trap, the string should be slightly loose. This way, if a cat touches or steps on the string, there won't be as much risk of triggering the trap by accident. When you are preparing to start the process, you must pull the string slowly and gently to get out the excess slack, and then be able to pull the string with one swift move.

Err on the side of caution. If you are not sure if you should trigger the trap, don't rush. It's better to let a cat leave than rush the trigger and end up letting the cat go.

- ***Once a cat is captured***

When you see that a cat has been captured, don't rush straight over to cover the trap. Remember that you want to keep intrusions to a minimum. Most cats will be very agitated and then start struggling inside the trap. If that happens, go over and cover the trap with the cloth, then step back for a moment and give the animal time to calm down. However, if the cat continues eating or is calmly sitting, wait and watch if there are any other cats about to enter any of the other traps that are frightened if you go immediately to the trap place.

When a cat starts to panic, don't release it for fear that it will hurt himself. It will be calmer once the trap is covered, and this may be the only chance to capture it. Some cats may have a bleeding nose or broken nails due to their explosive behaviour inside the trap, but these minor injuries are not cause for serious concern. Cover the trap or carrier. The captured cats should be taken to a sheltered spot as soon as possible and should not be visible or heard by the remaining ones, even if the traps are covered. Traps and carriers should always be kept covered from the time the cat is captured until it is released in the colony.

If you have time, continue trapping as long as there are still cats in the colony. If you find that there are a few cats left and that there is no way they will let themselves be captured, call it a day and collect the traps. Continue to withhold food from these cats and take those captured to the confinement place or to the clinic.

Remember that the best chance to capture those last two or three difficult cats is when the rest of the colony has already been captured and removed from the territory. This way, you don't need to try to distinguish them from a larger group, in addition, they are becoming increasingly hungry and more likely to go into a trap with every day that goes by. Therefore, we recommend that you continue to try to capture the remaining cats while the rest of the colony is away.

- ***Transferring a cat from a trap to a carrier***

As previously mentioned, if you do not have enough traps for all the cats in the colony, you will have to transfer the trapped cats into carriers in order to reuse the traps. It is important to use two people to carry out this transfer safely. Hold the rear door of the trap firmly against the entrance of the carrier, aligning both perfectly. During the transfer, the trap should be secured between the legs of a trapper, avoiding any space between the two doors through which the cat can escape. The trap must be covered with a towel and the carrier lined with newspaper. The other trapper must also hold the carrier firmly between their legs against the trap entry.

Once the trap and the carrier are properly positioned, the trapper who is holding the trap door partially lifts it, without removing it completely, and the trapper holding the carrier also holds the corresponding door, keeping it pressed against the small opening created between the trap and the carrier.



If you are using a Ferplast carrier, of the model mentioned above, it is preferable to remove the door before the transference, and having the pins closed until the end (still placing the door on the bottom ones).

To get the cat to move from the trap to the carrier, gradually remove the towel that covers the trap, starting from the back of the trap towards the carrier.

Feral cats have a natural tendency to move from light to darkness so, as soon as the cat feels exposed, it should move into the carrier, where it's darker and where it will feel more protected. If the animal does not move, gently blow or lightly touch one side of the trap to push it gently. Yelling, hitting, touching the trapped cat, or throwing water at it are ineffective and cruel actions.

As soon as the cat is inside the carrier, place the trap's door and hold it firmly against the carrier. Slide the carrier's door back in, snap it back into the lower holes, which pins should always be closed, and then close the upper pins tightly. Separate the carrier from the trap only after checking that the door of the carrier is properly closed.

If you have captured two cats in the same trap you can transport them together or transfer them, one at a time, into separate carriers with the abovementioned reservations regarding the offspring.

If you must do the transfer alone, follow the same process with these changes: Place the trap, only if it's a mdc eezicatch cat trap, against a wall, tyre or other solid surface.



If you are transferring from a Drop Trap to a carrier, there are some specific steps to follow. The transfer process is usually more time consuming and always needs two people to be done safely. If the cat is determined to stay at only one end of the trap, ask another trapper to get down on the ground, face-to-face with the cat (instead of leaning over it, which would frighten and disorient the animal). Assuming that the cat can't see the other trapper because of the towel, it will be more willing to move away from the other trapper and towards the exit. If you are doing a transfer that is proving particularly difficult, it may be useful to interrupt the process, cover the trap again and wait for a while before starting again, allowing the cat some time to calm down.

- ***Transfer to the veterinary clinic***

If a cat starts to move a lot while being transported, tilt the trap or carrier to a 45° angle, forcing the animal to spend its energy on keeping its balance.

The transportation has to be done in a way that both animals and driver are secure and also in a non-stressful way to the animals. Before putting the carriers inside the car, always confirm if they are properly closed.

Try to put the front of the carrier faced to a rigid area.

Check if the carriers are secure and avoid stacking them unless you are sure that they won't fall, which can be prevented or with the car itself, e.g., interior with straight lines therefore all carriers are stable, or with the use of car bungee cords.

Avoid high or low temperatures, loud music. It's always wise to use some kind of lining underneath the carriers because some cats can urinate through the towels that are covering the carriers.



Important note: when you arrive at the veterinary clinic or confinement place, always check that the doors of the carriers are tightly closed before removing the cats from the car. Sometimes, the cats pull the towel covering the carrier inside it thus turning and opening the door pins. You should always carry and support the carriers by the base and never by the handle.

As an added safety measure, you can even remove the handles from the carriers to ensure that they will never be used, putting animals at risk. A small gap is enough for the door to open.

The Capture

Postoperative care for cats in traps or carriers

Whatever the size of the cage, if inside there is a smaller box in the corner, it is inside of it that a feral cat will spend most of its time. In the stressful situation of confinement, the feral cat always prefers spaces that are more closed in and dark, which makes them feel hidden and protected. This is the reason why it should be provided a smaller kind of shelter, to a feral cat in a cage, like a carrier or a closed box with only one side opening for it to hide in.

As long as the traps or carriers are covered and kept clean using the techniques described below, the cats will be perfectly fine and quickly get used to the feeding and cleaning routine. Usually, the cats stay nested and quiet throughout this period.

Materials required

- Traps (90 cm long with a back door) and/or medium-sized carriers as previously shown;
- Trap partitions (at least one pair) – If you're going to keep the cats in the traps;
- Towels (one per trap/carrier);
- Newspapers or pee pads;
- Water bowls (with flat bases);
- Small food dishes;
- Plastic lining - If you're going to keep the cats in the traps;
- Latex gloves;
- Garbage bags;
- Tables (optional);
- Metal tongs.

Preparing the confinement space

If you're going to keep the cats in traps, lay plastic sheeting on the floor as this will catch any debris that might fall out of the traps. At the end of the postoperative period, the plastic can be rolled up and disposed of, which usually resolves any odour issues. Tables are not essential, but it is quicker and easier to take care of the cats when the traps/carriers are up off the ground. If you use tables, cover them with plastic too.

Align the traps/carriers, a few centimeters apart, with the front doors all facing the same way and cover them up. If you know that two cats are especially close (mother and kittens, siblings, etc.), put their traps/carriers close to each other and use the same towel to cover both. The temperature of the containment area must be mild.

The Capture

Feeding and cleaning

This process must be done twice a day for each cat.

Cleaning a trap

1. Start at the front of the trap. Make the cat move towards the rear, by leaving the trap covered and start uncovering the front by folding the towel to the direction to which you want the animal to go. If this doesn't work, tap lightly on the side of the trap. If the animal still does not move, insert one of the partitions and gently push it. The reason you start at the front and end with food is to avoid pushing the cat up against the food or water during the cleaning process.
2. Once the cat has moved to the back of the trap, insert two partitions from above, one next to the other so the cat can't escape when you open the front door. You should always use two partitions, as a cat may be strong enough to bend or push one partition up and escape.
3. If you only have one partition, insert it horizontally through the side of the trap, rather than vertically from above. Make sure the partition has gone through completely to the opposite side.
4. While the cat is held in the back of the trap, open the front door, remove the soiled newspaper/pee pad and replace it. The newspaper/pad makes the trap more comfortable for the cat and also serves as a litter box. Do not attempt to put a litter box, even a small one, inside the trap. If desired, place a small towel in front of the trap. Cats like to nest on top of towels, but note that these tend to get dirty quickly.
5. Close the front door, make sure it is locked, and remove the partitions. Unfold the towel to re-cover the front of the trap.
6. Uncover the back of the trap by folding the towel towards the front and make sure the cat has moved. Insert the two partitions from above, next to each other, and open the back door. Replace the soiled newspaper/pee pad.
7. Near the rear door, place the food on a plate and the water in a shallow dish with a flat bottom. Do not use cans of cat food as they have sharp edges and can cause injury. Water containers (eg for bird cages) that attach to the sides of the trap are also practical.

8. Close the rear door, making sure it is locked. Remove the partitions and then unfold the towel over the back of the trap.

When dealing with many cats, it may be useful to work on an "assembly line":

- Put the newspaper/pads on top of each trap;
- Take care of all the front parts;
- Prepare all the food dishes and water containers and place them on top of the traps;
- Place food and water on the back of the traps.

Cleaning a carrier

If you are taking care of cats in carriers, be extra careful when opening the door to change the newspaper/pee pads and place food and water. Open the door as narrowly as possible, remove the food and water bowls (which should be kept in the front of the carrier, next to the door) and then remove the soiled newspaper/pad. To place the clean newspaper/pad fold it so you can insert it in the carrier with the door only slightly open and place it on the carrier.



Then place the containers of food and water, always opening the door as narrowly as possible. You can use tongs to remove the soiled newspaper/pad and food bowls and a watering can, to refill the water dish.

Normally, cats will remain huddled at the end of the carrier throughout the whole process. If a cat has a tendency to try to escape, the safest way to take care of it will be to transfer it (following the same method as described above for the “transferring to a carrier”) to another carrier which already has clean newspaper/pad, food and an empty container for the water, which you can then fill with the watering can.



While taking care of the cats, always keep the door to the confinement area securely closed so that , in the event of a cat running away, the animal will be contained to that area.

The Capture

If a cat escapes

If an incident occurs and a cat escapes, the most important thing to remember is that you should never try to catch a feral cat by hand or with a blanket. The cat will be very frightened and will struggle to free itself, which can cause serious injuries. What you should do is re-capture it with a trap.

Recovery period

In accordance with the international best practices, we balance the need for a reasonable postoperative period and the importance of minimising the stress associated with confinement, as well as the need to keep the TNR process as simple as possible. Thus, we recommend that, during surgery, all cats are given a long-term injection of antibiotic and anti-inflammatory drugs (48 hours' worth, at least) and a recovery time of 24 to 48 hours. Males and females neutered using the flank technique can be released in just 24 hours.

No cat showing health problems should be released without treatment. However, please remember that, due to the stress associated with confinement of street cats, it may not be advisable to subject them to prolonged treatment.

In certain cases, euthanasia may be the best option considering the animal's welfare. These decisions should be made on a case-by-case basis with your vet.

A nursing cat represents a special case when her kittens are out on the street without her, which justifies her being released sooner, as soon as she is recovered from the surgery.

Note: ask the vet to make well-reinforced soluble sutures if spayed by midline approach.

The Capture

Return to the colony

Feral cats should always be returned to their original territory. They are extremely territorial and cannot be released safely into a new location without a transition period. If a cat is simply released in an unfamiliar place, its instinct will be to try to return to its original territory. The result can be disastrous: the cat could be hit by a car, or get lost, ending up disoriented and scared in unknown territory, without anyone to care for it, without its colony companions and vulnerable to unknown dangers. Freeing a feral or street cat in a new territory without any kind of relocation process is essentially the same as abandoning it.

After returning cats to their territory, some cats may disappear for a few days or even a week or two. However, the animals will likely soon return to their previous routines and learn to trust their caregiver again.



The Capture

Other decisions to consider

- ***Making a decision if you think a cat is nursing kittens***

The best way to proceed, when, in the colony, there is a cat that is nursing will depend on the age of the kittens and the information that you have about the location of the litter. One way to check if a cat is nursing is to uncover the trap and look at her belly: if her nipples are clearly swollen with wet fur around them she is likely to have a litter.

- ***Litters of an unknown age and unknown location***

If the cat is nursing and you do not know where the litter is or how old they are, then you are faced with a difficult decision. You can release the cat, knowing that it is very likely that you will never be able to capture it again, since a large percentage of cats do not re-enter a trap after having been captured once, and that she will continue to have many more litters in the future; or you can sterilize her as soon as possible, whenever possible using the flank technique, and release her as soon as she's recovered so she will be able to nurse her kittens.

When making this decision, there are several factors to be taken into consideration. Feral kittens have a very high mortality rate, so there's a chance they might not be alive. On the other hand, kittens with more than two weeks old survive at least a day without their mother. If you can sterilize the mother and release her within 24 hours, then the kittens are likely to survive. An important factor to consider is that it is common that mother cats from the same colony will nurse each other's litters so it is quite likely that another queen will nurse the kittens while their mother is absent.

Some people feel it is wrong to run the risk of letting kittens die in the absence of their mother; others believe that the responsible attitude is sterilising the mother to prevent future litters, even though the current litter may possibly die, since this female would continue to give birth to many more kittens who, more often than not, will end up suffering and dying in atrocious ways. We included ourselves in the second group.

If, only during surgery, a female cat is found to be nursing, she should be released back into the colony within 24 hours after the operation or as soon as she is alert and recovered. Sterilised females are still able to nurse.

- ***Litter of known age but unknown location***

A colony caregiver may have noticed that one of the cats was pregnant and knows the approximate age of the litter but doesn't know where they are. Knowing the age of the kittens helps decision making. Ideally, the capture of the mother would be delayed until

the litter is old enough to begin showing up at the feeding point, and therefore be captured too. However, it may not be possible to delay the TNR programme for so long or prevent the nursing mother from entering a trap. Try to at least delay the capture until the kittens are two weeks old to increase the probability of surviving a day without nursing. Make advance arrangements with the vet to have the nursing mother sterilized immediately upon capture.

- ***Both the age and location of the litter are known***

Knowing the age and location of the litter offers you more options. The first thing you must decide is if you're going to try to socialise the kittens and put them up for adoption. Taking docile cats and/or kittens which can be socialised off the street and providing them with a good home is always preferable, but resources are not always available. Make sure you have potential adopters or available foster families before proceeding to capture.



- ***Adopters or foster families are not available***

If there are no adopters or foster families available to take in the kittens, try to postpone their capture until they are old enough to be neutered. The kittens can be neutered at 2 months or 800 g of weight, although surgeries in animals so young require a veterinarian with experience in this type of procedure. If you can wait until the kittens are at least two months old, they can be neutered and released along with their mother.

- ***Adopters or foster families are available***

If you plan to put kittens up for adoption, you can:

1. Capture the whole family and keep them in a cage until the kittens are old enough to be adopted. In this case, weighing up the welfare of the mother that will need be kept in confinement for the shortest time possible, and the interests of the kittens, which should be kept with the mother as long as possible, and also the need to have the kittens socialise with people early, our policy is to separate the kittens from the mother when they are 6 weeks old. At this point, the mother will be sterilised and returned to the colony and the kittens put up for adoption.
2. Let the family stay in the colony and remove the kittens from their mother when they are 6 to 7 weeks of age; the separation, in this case, occurs early to avoid the potential risks of life on the street and the need to start the socialisation process as soon as possible. In this case, you must try to sterilise the queen in case this wasn't made already.

The first option implies considerably less work than raising kittens without the mother. If you have the mother in a cage with them, she's the one who will care for them while the caregiver just needs to feed her, clean the litter box and interact with the kittens. Kittens learn a lot from their mother and being with her and their siblings is how they develop many of their social skills. There is a certain risk when trapping and confining a feral family: the mother may attack her own kittens. However, this is very rare.

The Capture

Capturing the family of cats

It is preferable to capture the kittens before the mother. If you can capture all the kittens first and you're having difficulty capturing the mother, you can use them to attract her. Put the kittens in a small carrier and position it with the door against the rear door of the trap. Cover the carrier and both sides of the trap with a towel, leaving only the front door of the trap open, and arm the trap. This way, the only visible path for the mother to reach her offspring will be by entering the trap. The kittens should never be placed inside the trap, since they can be seriously injured when the queen realizes that she has been captured and starts to panic.



If you are capturing kittens that are not yet weaned, have formula prepared to feed them while you wait to capture the mother, as this may take some time.

Remember that you can never leave a lactating mother alone without her offspring in the colony, so if it becomes clear that you won't be able to capture the mother, you must leave a male kitten with her that you will then trap and neuter when weaned.

The Capture

Other scenarios

- **Pregnant cats**

A cat's gestation period is approximately two months. During the early stages of pregnancy, it can only be verified during the sterilisation surgery. If a cat is visibly pregnant, you can:

1. Capture and sterilise her, essentially carrying out an abortion, and return
2. her to the colony;
3. Capture her and confine her until the kittens are born and weaned;
4. Don't capture her, and allow the kittens to be born in the colony.

Depending on the experience and the veterinarian's policy, cats can be sterilised safely up until the last days of gestation. Although this is what is recommended by the best international practices, you should speak with your vet about their policy on this matter.

Some people consider abortion to be unacceptable. However, it is necessary to take into account the serious overpopulation of cats that exists and the great difficulty in finding families for all of them.

If you decide not to sterilise the cat, the options will be for you to take her home and let her deliver the kittens in a cage, raising them in confinement (for a maximum of 5 weeks, as mentioned above) which raises questions of physical and psychological well-being for the assisted cat and contributes worsening of the animal overpopulation, or you could allow the kittens to be born in the colony in hope of capturing the whole family again later. Letting the cat give birth in a safe and controlled environment is much safer for the kittens. The mortality rate of feral kittens is quite high. They succumb to anaemia caused by fleas, are susceptible to diseases because their immune systems are still undeveloped and are more likely not to survive the common dangers, such as being run over or being mistreated.

Given the severe overpopulation of cats that exists today and the high mortality rate of feral kittens, we believe that it does not make sense to allow the birth of litters in the colonies if it is possible to avoid it. When a pregnant cat is captured she should not be released, whether it is at the beginning or at the end of her pregnancy, due to the high risk of never being captured. Thus, our policy is to spay pregnant females (even at the end of the gestation) and release them again in the colony.

If a cat goes into labour between the capture and sterilisation surgery, our option is confining the mother and kittens in a cage until they are weaned and sent for adoption.

- **Seemingly friendly cats**

Never attempt to catch a feral cat with your hands and place it inside a carrier, even if the cat likes to rub itself around your legs, lets you stroke it, or even lets you pick it up. Street and feral cats learn to trust their caregivers, and some will demonstrate affection. Don't assume, however, that you can treat them as if they are pet cats. It is dangerous to grab a street or feral cat and force it to enter a confined space. The cat may be terrified and bite or scratch in an attempt to escape, which can result in serious injury. It is safer to use the same recommended trapping procedures for every cat, unless you are absolutely sure that a particular cat is a pet that was recently abandoned. Still, keep in mind that many pet cats do not like to be put in carriers and may react aggressively.

If you are sure that the cat is docile, place a bit of tuna or something tasty in the back of the carrier and let the animal go in by itself, closing the door behind it very quickly.

- **Sick cats**

Although we do not advocate the use of nets for catching cats, these may be useful when a cat is unable to enter the trap due to an injury or illness in a way that it has lost its sense of smell and ignores the bait. We recommend Catch Net for Small Animals from MDC Exports.

- **Kittens**

To maximise the chances of catching several juvenile/kittens at once, use the trap in manual mode, preferably the Multi-Cat or Drop-Trap. If attempting to catch kittens less than four weeks of age with your hands, use sturdy gloves to avoid bites.

- **Cats that are difficult to capture**

For the TNR programme to be successful, all the elements of the colony must be neutered, without exception. It is the only way to ensure that no more litters will be born. However, there are cats that won't go into a traditional trap, regardless of how long food has been withheld, or what type of bait is being used.

You should never use tranquilisers. The cat may be out of your sight after ingesting the medication and you may not be able to find it after the sedation starts to affect it because it will look for a place to hide. Using tranquiliser darts in an animal so small is also dangerous. Instead, try one of these methods:

- 1. Use a Drop Trap**

A drop-trap is an excellent tool to catch difficult cats, since it falls over the animal, without it having to enter a confined space.

2. Train cats to enter the trap

If you can, take an unarmed trap to the colony for a few days. Cats can be trained to go inside it by simply placing the food inside it and removing the rear door.

3. Camouflage the trap

Sometimes camouflaging the trap with leaves and branches will help attract the cats. Cover the sides and the base of the trap with leaves and branches, but not the rear door and make sure that it does not prevent the front door from closing.



Relocation

When is it appropriate to relocate a colony?

When hearing about a feral colony whose population is out of control and that is facing hostility from the community, the first instinct is often to move the cats to a more secure location. However, finding a new location is very difficult and the adaptation process to the new territory is extremely challenging. After the food, the territory is the most important factor for feral cats' survival. Once a colony is controlled by a TNR programme, cats can live relatively long and healthy lives, as long as the security of their territory is maintained.

Given that their territory as well as the bonds that they develop with each other are so important for feral cats, relocation should only be considered when their environment is truly in danger. Most problems can be resolved through TNR: the initial hostility of the community due to the noise, foul odours, and endless litters of kittens will dissipate with neutering; homeowners' complaints can often be resolved by simply changing the feeding point.

Relocating the colony is a laborious process and requires that the cats are confined, to their new territory, for three weeks (which is inherently stressful) until they adapt to their new territory and learn their food source has changed and are able to orient themselves in the new location. Otherwise, they are likely to run away in search of their previous home and will face a series of dangers.

Even in situations involving significant changes to the colony's territory, such as roadworks, building's demolitions/renovations, etc., it's always preferable to move the animals to a nearby safe place through, by gradually displacing their feeding point, with the aid of the caregiver, than relocating them.

Another thing to keep in mind is what will happen to the old territory if the cats are removed. If food and homing centres are still available, then, sooner or later, there will be a vacuum effect: new cats will occupy the space to take advantage of these benefits and reproduce within the limits of the capacity of the site, forming a new colony.

For all these reasons, every opportunity of letting the cats stay where they are must always be explored and relocation should be thought of as the last possible resort.

- ***Choosing a new territory***

The first step is to find a new location. It does not have to mimic the original territory: cats that lived in a warehouse can be relocated to a backyard, those who lived in an

abandoned building can go to a farm, etc.

What the new territory should have is:

1. A reliable caregiver that carefully follows the relocation guidelines and accepts the responsibility of caring for the cats in the long term;
2. A structure (barn, garage) that provides shelter and protects them from the elements during the confinement period;
3. Far from construction in progress or heavy traffic.

In case of need, cats can be relocated to a territory where there already exists a cat colony but it makes the process more complicated for the newcomers. Investigate potential dangers such as predatory animals (dogs, for example), hostility from neighbours or institutions, proximity to hunting grounds, and other environmental hazards.

Do not relocate the cats until you have inspected the site and met the caregiver personally. A farmhouse may sound perfect but if the caregiver is there only on weekends it won't work, as the cats must be fed daily and will need constant supervision for three weeks. Don't risk having an unpleasant surprise and having to make difficult decisions on the spot, with the animals in tow.

Relocation

The relocation process

All cats in the colony should be rehomed together, so as not to break the strong bonds that exist between them. If this is not feasible, cats can be divided into two or more groups, while respecting the special bonds that may exist between them. But you must never resettle a cat from a colony alone into a new territory, since the likelihood of it staying there is strongly reduced. A cat's ability to settle into a new location is extremely influenced by the number of fellow colony members relocated with it.

The process will be stressful for everyone, so try to do it as smoothly and quickly as possible, and without incident. Capture the cats, sterilize them (if you have not yet implemented TNR) and give them two or three days to recover. Make sure you provide as many details as possible about the animals' old routines to the new caregiver. If the cats are accustomed to a certain type of food, maintain it. Each change will be a factor of stress for them.

Before transporting the cats to the new location, have everything ready at the destination. In the space where the animals will be confined, place a large cage or several smaller ones if the animals don't fit all together in one (always place several cats in each cage), in a quiet spot, preferably near places where they can hide after their release.

If the weather is mild, you could fence and seal off a small piece of land all the way around (including overhead, or with "horse" fences) creating a cage-like structure and put shelters inside. This way, the cats will be free inside an enclosed area and, at the end of the period of confinement, all you have to do is open the door and let them out, as soon as they feel confident enough to do this. If you don't have this possibility, they will have to remain confined in cages. The cages must contain a carrier where the cats can hide, a litter box, food and water as further described in the chapter The Treatment Cage.

In climates with harsh winters, avoid making a relocation during the colder months – cats won't be able to move around a lot and the cold can put their health at risk. If you really must do this, place thermally insulated shelters inside their cages instead of carriers. Cover each cage with blankets.

Cats might try to escape, especially in the early days. Make sure the caregiver knows the procedures further described in the chapter The Treatment Cage. Cats need water, food and fresh litter once a day, so the cage door will open frequently, giving them opportunities to try to escape. If a cat escapes, ask the caregiver to leave food, water and a used litter box around the site.

Encourage the caregiver to speak to the cats to become familiar to them. If the cats learn to trust the caregiver, the relocation process has a better chance of being successful. Maintaining a consistent feeding schedule is useful; as well as providing wet food during their confinement and for a few more weeks after their release. Wet food is more appealing and consumed more rapidly than dry food and helps the cats get used to a new routine. Gradually, a few weeks after they are released, the wet food may be replaced or supplemented by dry food if preferred. Water should always be available.

Three weeks of confinement is ideal.

Keep in touch with the new caregiver. Ask how the cats are settling in and let them know that you are available to offer help or advice. If, at some point, the place of relocation ceases to be safe, make sure the caregiver alerts you to this and knows that you will be available to provide support.

Relocation

Sanctuaries/homing centres

Homing centres or catteries are not suitable places for feral or street cats, whose psychological and physical well-being will be severely compromised. Due to their temperament and lack of sociability they should not be confined or forced into close contact with unknown people or animals.

A sanctuary where the animals live in freedom can be a good option, although we know that finding a good sanctuary can be even more difficult than making a successful relocation. The problem is clear: there are hundreds of thousands of feral and street cats and very few well-run and trusted sanctuaries. It is hard enough to get a place in a sanctuary for even one single cat, let alone a whole colony. Unfortunately, poorly managed sanctuaries are everywhere. These tend to be understaffed, lacking in space, food, funds and basic care.

If you do consider placing the animals in a sanctuary, here are some questions you should ask:

1. How do you handle sick cats – are veterinary services available on site?
2. What is your euthanasia policy?
3. Do you have a limit of animals to accept?
4. Do you comply with the rigorous method of relocating feral and street cats?

Once you have inspected the place and obtained all the answers, you will be able to make an informed decision on whether the sanctuary could provide a happy and healthy life for the cats.



Relocation

Managing the colony

- **Location**

Ideally, a colony should be easily accessible to the caregiver but inaccessible and out of sight from the public. If the colony is located in a place often frequented by people, feed the cats as far away as possible from the sidewalks and remove the food containers as soon the animals finish eating, leaving only a clean container with fresh water in a discreet location.

If the colony is in a public space, always consider the municipal regulations on this matter, when they exist.



- **Feeding**

You should not start feeding a colony where cats have been ear-tipped unless you are sure the animals are not obtaining food from another source or are not self-sufficient from hunting and scavenging. This is because it may disturb the course of a TNR programme in progress in a neighbourhood nearby and/or lure the cats away from their usual feeding point. Food is the main connection between humans and street cats - they inhabit a certain location because there is a feeding point, usually provided by people. The type of food and how it is provided can make a big difference in the health

of the colony and in maintaining good relations with the neighbourhood. Each colony has its own characteristics and caregivers must adapt to local conditions, as well as considering their own funds and schedule availability.

Feeding street cats without implementing a TNR programme can have nefarious consequences and, in the medium term, will cause more suffering for the animals. There is a very close connection between nutrition and reproduction: an increase in available food sources will lead to an increase of reproductive activity. In short, someone who begins to feed a colony of cats should be prepared to assume all the responsibilities that come from a rapid increase in population.

- **Type of food**

Street cats should be fed good quality food that provides for the specific nutritional needs of cats. There are two important factors to be taken into consideration: firstly, nutrition is important for street cats as they are subjected to stressful conditions and the physical demands of life on the street, with no better way to preserve their health than to feed them well. Secondly, but equally important, are the financial conditions of the caregiver – it makes no sense to feed the animals the best brand of food if it means a high personal sacrifice.

- **Type of feeder**

The type of feeder will depend on its location, including its visibility to the public and if it is on private property or in a public area. The ideal feeder protects the food and water from the elements and allows one or two cats to have access to the inside, where they will eat. You can use a large plastic box with a lid as a feeder. Cut one of the larger sides of the box, leaving a rim of about 7 cm. A large opening is necessary to prevent a dominant cat from keeping the others from eating or attacking them inside. The feeders made from plastic boxes are easy to make and clean because of their removable lids and the ease with which they are assembled. The box must not be so large that cats will sleep inside, except if you are providing a structure with the double purpose of shelter and feeding point.

A feeder can also be made of wood. The wooden feeders should be placed slightly above ground level to prevent water from entering and have a roof tilted backwards to drain rainwater away from the entrance. In order to prevent wood decay, wooden feeders should be painted with waterproof latex paint and its joints filled with silicone glue.

If it is not possible to feed the cats regularly, an automatic dry food and water dispenser can be left inside the feeder or in a location protected from weather conditions.

- **Amount of food**

One of the arguments in favour of TNR is the fact that a colony of neutered cats will defend their territory from the intrusion of new and unneutered cats, thus preventing the resumption of the reproductive cycle in that location. But a key factor for determining how well a colony defends itself against new cats is the amount of food available. If there is excess food, there will be little motivation for the residents to chase off new cats. The key is to find the right balance and feed the cats properly, without placing excessive doses that may attract other animals. Most domestic cats that we think are well built are actually obese. Feral/street cats need far more dexterity of movement to survive on the streets, and should be able to jump, climb, fit into small spaces and run and escape from various dangers. If fed too much they lose their fitness and are, in fact, put in more danger.



- **Keeping the area clean**

A good way to avoid problems with the neighbours is to keep the feeding point clean. Pick up all empty cans, plates, bags and plastic spoons, etc., even if they were left by someone else. A feeding area that is dirty and full of garbage is not only an unpleasant sight for the neighbourhood, but it may also cause legal issues by jeopardizing public health and wholesomeness. If you can, help keep the surroundings clean in addition to the feeding point. This will reinforce the notion that your presence on site is beneficial to the community.

Ants can be kept away from food by creating a small moat: fill a flat, wide, high edged container with a little water and place the bowl of food in the middle. The water will prevent the ants from reaching the food, but cats will still be able to eat.

Flies are a problem especially when wet food is left outdoors in hot environments. Always remove the surplus food after the animals have eaten.

Pigeons nest and sleep after sunset. Prevent birds from eating the cats' food by feeding them at the end of the day.

Relocation

Winter shelters

Feral and street cats easily find secure locations where they can take shelter. In milder climates, providing shelter is not a particular matter of concern, but in colder climates, if there isn't a warm and dry place to sleep, cats can get sick and get frostbite on their ears, nose and paws. In these circumstances it is important to provide adequate winter shelter.

The construction should serve the double purpose of shelter and feeding station, separated by an interior partition. We recommend that the shelters are raised a few centimetres from the ground, in order to protect them from damage caused by damp ground. The structure should be completely closed, with openings of sufficient size to allow the entry and exit of cats. It is essential that both spaces (shelter/feeding point) have two entries to avoid the cats being cornered or trapped. The shelters must have two essential characteristics: good insulation and minimal extra space possible. Insulation is necessary to maintain the animals' body heat and the excess space must be avoided in order to reduce the area to be heated.

Taking this into account, it is better to build two smaller shelters that house three to four cats each, than a large one that fits six to eight. In a smaller shelter, even if there are only one or two cats inside, that should be enough to generate heat. In a larger shelter, if only a small number of animals are using it, there will be too much free space.

In climates with harsher winters, it may be helpful to include an air space between two wooden boards in the walls and roof. This space can be left empty or filled with an insulating material. The roof of these shelters must be removable in order to facilitate their cleaning. We recommend adding a lock, so that only caregivers have access. Inside the shelter you can place materials for extra comfort and warmth. However, these should only be used if they are periodically checked, to replace materials that have become wet or soiled. If you cannot make these periodic checks, then leave the interior of the shelter empty.

Only use insulating materials that cats can nest in. Materials in which animals can only lay on top of should be avoided, such as blankets, towels, or newspapers which, when they are under the cat, will only remove the body heat. Straw is a good insulating material. It's better than hay because it absorbs more moisture, is less prone to mould or rotting, and is less likely to cause allergic reactions. A paper box with newspaper cut into strips or a pillowcase loosely filled with Styrofoam "peanuts" can also make comfortable nests for cats.

As in the case of feeding points, the site chosen for the shelter should be as discreet as possible. The more hidden they are, the more likely the cats are to use them.

Note that where the shelters and feeding stations are located will determine the place where the cats will spend most of their time. You can use them to guide the animals to a more appropriate place, improving their relationship with the community.



Adoptable Cats

Whenever possible, socialised, friendly cats and kittens should be removed from the colony and adopted to good homes. However, if you do not have the resources to do so, either because there is no space in homing centres or because there are no foster families available, then sterilising them and continuing to care for them in their territory will be the right choice. There are three categories of cats in colonies that are potentially adoptable:

- Abandoned pet cats that are still sociable with people;
- Kittens less than 2 months old;
- The rare case of the friendly street cat.



Adoptable Cats

Determining if a cat is adoptable

- *Abandoned pet cats*

When a cat is suspected of being a pet cat abandoned in a colony, you should observe its behaviour before capturing it to determine if it is, indeed, an abandoned pet animal. Is the cat in question a recent arrival to the colony? Does it remain apart from the rest? Did it trust you immediately or shortly after it met you? There are street cats that can weave around your legs and allow you to pet them, but it is something that usually takes some time to happen. Pet cats tend to be less suspicious and seek affection from humans more quickly.

Another aspect to consider is how the cat will react once inside the trap and has calmed down. If the animal meows or appears to be relaxed or wanting your attention, it is unlikely to be a street cat. Street cats tend to cower in the farthest corner of the trap. In addition, most street cats don't like to make eye contact with people. Wrongly, it is common to assume that if a trapped cat is agitated or panicking then it must be unsocialised and, if it does not panic, it will be friendly. Almost all cats, whether they are feral or pet, will panic when they realise they are trapped and at the mercy of a stranger. Only later after they have calmed down will it be possible to make a more accurate assessment.

When a pet cat is abandoned and spends some time on the streets on its own, struggling to survive, the experience can be quite traumatic. Later, after being in a safe place, it may show some stress behaviours, such as prolonged meowing, aggression or lethargy and may need a few days to get over the trauma.

Always remember that there is no fool proof test. All cats are different and all these signs should be considered in order to make a correct assessment. The difficulty in distinguishing street or feral from pet cats is yet another reason to never try to catch an unfamiliar cat with your hands and place it on a carrier. If you are wrong about the nature of the animal, you can get seriously injured or lose the cat, so always use the trap or the carrier. This warning also applies to young cats, even at just five or six weeks of age, they have teeth that are sharp enough and jaws strong enough to cause you injury.

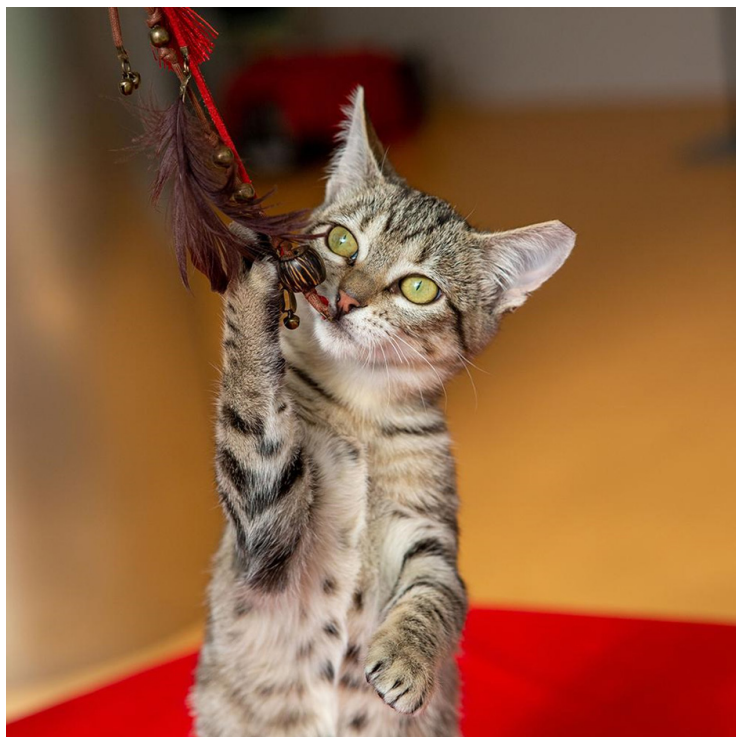
- ***Feral and street kittens***

Age is the key factor to determining how quickly feral/street kittens can be socialised. Although there are exceptions, kittens that are six to seven weeks old can be easily socialised, usually in a day or two, if they receive a lot of attention and direct human contact. After eight weeks of age, the degree of difficulty and uncertainty increases rapidly.

However, if it is still three months or less, with enough time and a lot of patience, there's a good chance that it can still be socialised enough to be adoptable. After three months, the odds of socialisation drop dramatically. It is more likely that at this age, a kitten may bond to the caregiver, but will shy away from all other humans, compromising their chances for adoption.

- ***Socialising street or feral kittens***

Some feral/street kittens socialize shortly after the first contact with humans. However, most will need more time, and may initially be frightened and bite you. Start by placing the kittens in a closed space such as a bathroom, where they are forced to deal with your presence. In the case they are very shy, start by placing them in a cage. If you let them loose, they will run away and hide and may never interact with you. Initially, place a carrier inside the closed space, where they can hide whenever they want. This way they will feel that there is a safe place within their territory. Before you try to touch them, try playing with them from a distance. A long stick with a feather tied to a string is great for this purpose. In this way, they will learn that the human being is not a threat. Talk to them constantly and be patient.



Once they are comfortable, which will be demonstrated by how quickly they will want to play and stop showing fear in your presence, start interacting more with them. When the kittens are comfortable with you touching them, which can take a few days, you can start picking them up. Increase the contact slowly until the kittens stay in your lap and purr while they are being petted. When you are going to interact with the kittens, always take a treat - it is important that they connect your presence with something pleasant. The duration of this process will depend on the temperament and age of the kittens.

The more human contact feral kittens have with you, the quicker they will be socialised. So, play and talk to them as much as you can. It is preferable to interact with them for short periods several times throughout the day, than to interact with them just once a day for a longer period of time, leaving them alone for the rest of the day. It is also important to have several people interacting with them. In this way, it prevents the kittens from socialising only with you, which will hinder their adoption.

Even the youngest kittens may keep some of their feral characteristics, such as not wanting to leave their territory or a greater sensitivity to changes in their environment. These behaviours may remain for life and should be anticipated in order to relieve their stress.

- ***Sociable adult stray pet cats***

The fact that a stray pet cat acts in a friendly manner towards its caregiver while in its own territory, does not necessarily mean that it will react well and remain docile if it is removed from its usual space and taken home. That said, there are stray pet cats that are fond of humans, especially if some time has passed since they were neutered. A good sign that domesticity and adoption are a possibility is if the cat becomes sociable with strangers or does not show fear or run away in its presence.





Kittens

Determining the age of young cats

Determining the age of kittens is difficult, since the physical characteristics and the growth rate may vary greatly from one individual to another, and the following factors should be considered:

- Teeth

1. First baby teeth come at around two or three weeks of age;
2. The permanent incisors appear at around four months;
3. The permanent canines usually appear around age five months;
4. The permanent molars and premolars appear between five and six months.

- Weight

Usually, kittens increase their weight about 0.5 kg per month until four or six months of age (slightly less in the case of females). So, if a kitten weighs 1 kg it is likely to be about 2 months old. Feral/street cats, depending on the level of nutrition, can be smaller.

- Eyes

When kittens are born, their eyes are closed. Normally, the eyelids separate between 10 to 14 days of age. If the closed eyelids swell or are covered in pus the kitten must be taken immediately to the vet. In some breeds/types, e.g. the Siamese and Orientals, the eyes may be partly open at birth and completely open in a few days. Kittens show different levels of strabismus until about eight weeks of age. The blue-grey iris of a newborn kitten changes to adult colouring after 23 days of age.

The membranous area of the ocular fundus (the back of the eye) gradually changes from a blue-grey colour to its definitive colour around the age of four months.

Kittens

What to do when you find a litter of newborn kittens?

If you find a litter in a colony, the kittens may be alone because their mother was disturbed or because she wandered off to look for food. Feral/street cats can spend several hours away from their litters.

The ideal is to leave the kittens where they are and observe them from a distance since it is very likely that the mother will return. If the mother does not return, it will be necessary to decide what to do with them.

The options are to place them in the care of another nursing cat (always the best option) or, if there is no mother cat available, feed them by hand. If the kittens are sick or too weak, you should take them to the vet to evaluate the most suitable option, treatment or euthanasia.

Kittens

Basic considerations for hand rearing kittens

Feeding kittens by hand is not an easy task and is very time consuming. Usually, all the needs of the young are met by their mother and it will always be difficult to replace her. A kitten fed in total isolation from other cats (mother and littermates) is at risk of poor sociological development, including nervousness and reduced ability to adapt to new environments, people or animals.

The biggest problems when trying to feed kittens by hand, are hypothermia, dehydration and hypoglycemia. These three problems are interconnected, and careful observation is necessary so that timely measures can be taken, should they occur. Newborn kittens need to be fed up to 10 times in each 24-hour period (every 2 to 3 hours even through the night); The caregiver's lifestyle will have to be flexible. Kittens, like human babies, need to be with the caregiver 24 hours a day during the first days of life. The caregiver must not exceed the predefined feeding interval.

When they are hungry, the kittens will be restlessly looking for milk. If they are not fed, they will be tired and eventually fall asleep again, which is not recommended.

- ***Temperature***

In the first three weeks of life it is recommended to use a small basket with several comfortable blankets and a soft toy with which the kittens can snuggle up to. Heat is essential for a newborn kitten, as it can't control its body temperature. Under natural conditions, the heat is achieved through direct contact with the mother's body. A newborn loses heat very fast, so it is important that it is kept dry and at the right temperature. Try to keep the room, where the kittens are, at an ambient temperature of around 24° C. The body of the kittens should be relaxed while sleeping and should be warm to the touch. You will notice soft spasms while they are resting.

- ***Hydration***

When a low relative humidity is combined with lack of fluid intake, the kittens run the risk of dehydration. Signs of dehydration include loss of skin elasticity and sticky mucous membranes (gums), in which case veterinary assistance is needed.

- ***Stimulating the sphincters***

It is necessary to stimulate kittens that are less than two weeks of age to urinate and defecate. The incontinent reflex is triggered when the mother licks the urogenital region of the kittens. In the case of orphaned kittens, the urinary discharge and defecation should be stimulated by the caregiver (using a damp cotton wool or moistened wipes

for human babies based on water, soft and free from perfume). This will need to be done for around the first four weeks until the kittens begin to urinate and defecate by themselves.

The urogenital area should be gently stimulated before and after meals. It is normal for kittens to cry a little before defecation; when evacuating, the crying must cease. From the age of three weeks, the stimulation should be done while the kitten is in the litterbox to encourage its use. You should also leave a small amount of faeces in the litterbox to show them where they need to go.

- **Feeding**

In the first two weeks of their life, healthy kittens eat and sleep 90% of the time. If they are crying excessively, or are unable to nurse, it usually means they are sick or are not drinking enough milk. Since the kittens are fragile and can die very quickly, they should be examined by a veterinarian as soon as possible. Do not use cow/goat milk because the protein and fat levels are too low. Use only cat milk formula available at veterinary clinics or pet stores. If the kittens have not received natural colostrum, during the first eight hours of life, if possible try to provide them with replacement colostrum. Natural colostrum is the first milk secreted by the cat in the first few feeds. Kittens that are less than two weeks old should be fed every 2 or 3 hours (or when they cry for food) and kittens that are two to four weeks of age can be fed every 6 or 8 hours. The milk must be heated up to 35-37.8 °C (approximately the same temperature as the skin on the human forearm).

- **Feeding by bottle**

There are bottles specially made for kittens, for sale in veterinary clinics and pet stores. Replacement milk formulas usually include a specific bottle for kittens with a suitable hole in the teat. If, when you turn the bottle upside down, the milk drips from the teat, the hole is too big and may cause asphyxiation from inhaling the milk. If, when you turn the bottle upside down, the milk only comes out after squeezing the bottle firmly, the hole is too small and its use may result in discouraging the kitten and consequently a refusal to eat. The correct hole size allows the milk to drip from the teat with a soft squeeze of the bottle (the baby should suck the milk, just squeeze the bottle to test the size of the teat, never when the kitten is suckling). The positioning of the bottle is important. The centre of the teat should be elevated and inserted toward the kittens' palate. In this way, it allows the kitten to roll its tongue around the teat, imitating the sucking of a nipple and not ingesting unwanted air. With your other hand hold the kitten under their stomach and keep the teat elevated at an angle of approximately 45°. This position is comfortable and safe for the kitten to drink milk.

The kitten will stop feeding naturally when it is satisfied and will attempt to move away from the teat. Do not force a kitten into drinking more milk: it would be at risk of pulmonary inhalation, which can cause death. Remember that the intake instructions are just a guide and can vary from kitten to kitten.

Bottle fed kittens feed more quickly than they would nursing from their mother and are more likely to suck in a little air even if you are being careful. Gently tap them on their back after feeding to ensure they do not have any trapped wind.

Hygiene is of the utmost importance for all feeding equipment (which must always be sterilized), as well as the personal hygiene of the caregiver while preparing the milk and stimulating kittens to urinate and defecate. Orphaned kittens are very prone to developing infections.

- ***Weight – newborn kitten***

It is advisable to monitor the growth rates of the newborns, weighing them regularly (keeping in mind that growth rates may vary slightly between them). It is better to weigh the kittens at the same time every day and maintain daily records. The kittens should double their birth weight after 7 to 10 days and then continue to gain weight steadily after that.

- 0-1 weeks 85 to 115 g
- 1-2 weeks 230 to 290 g
- 2-3 weeks 290 to 340 g
- 3-4 weeks 340 to 400 g
- +4 weeks 400 g or more

- ***Hypoglycaemia***

Hypoglycaemia is a result of inadequate or infrequent feeding. This can cause deep lethargy, muscle spasms and occasionally convulsions. If a kitten refuses to eat, don't wait: it is necessary to act immediately and hand it over to the care of a veterinarian. Kittens do not have any reserves and their physical condition will deteriorate rapidly.

- ***Intestinal problems***

Constipation is a very common problem for hand reared kittens due to the difficulty in stimulating defecation often enough. The normal faeces have the consistency of toothpaste. If the stools become too hard, causing the kitten to strain excessively or not to defecate for one or two days, you should take it to a vet. Diarrhoea is also a very serious problem for a kitten. It can be caused by excessive feeding, a replacement milk that is too concentrated, or an infection (often caused by lack of hygiene). Seek immediate vet assistance as dehydration can lead very quickly to death.

- ***In case of collapse***

If the kittens collapse or become dehydrated, they need immediate veterinary care, as they cool down very quickly. Usually, the vet injects them with subcutaneous fluids. Once the kittens have been warmed up and received fluid therapy, they should be left to rest. Feeding should only be resumed when they are warm and able to suckle.

- ***Weaning***

Weaning should start at three or four weeks of age. Initially, provide the kitten with replacement cat formula in a shallow dish. Then provide them with a canned or dry kitten food, mixed with a little replacement milk. This process must be continued until the kittens eat only solid, age-appropriate foods – increasing the amount of food and reducing the amount of milk over a period of a few weeks. Kittens are usually fully weaned by 8 weeks of age.

- ***Deworming***

Every kitten must be treated for parasites internally and externally at 3 weeks of age and must be weighed so that they are given the correct dosage. Some kittens will not show clinical signs of having intestinal parasites, while others may show signs of physical discomfort, loose or bloody stools, loss of appetite, swollen belly and weight loss. Ensure that any internal or external parasite treatment you use is suitable for the age of the kitten.

- ***Vaccination***

Kittens receive some protection against diseases in the form of maternal antibodies via the mother's colostrum. The protective effect of maternal antibodies lasts only a few weeks. The kitten vaccination programme must therefore be started at 8 weeks of age.



The Treatment Cage

Under normal conditions, feral and street cats are only kept in confinement for a 24 to 48 hours recovery time after their neutering surgery, and do not leave the carriers until release. Sometimes a cat needs to be confined for a longer period of time, because it has a serious injury, an illness that requires antibiotics or is a nursing cat with kittens.

With the exception of queens and their litters, the confinement period of a feral cat should not exceed two weeks due to the negative effect that the stress associated with captivity has on its immune system and general welfare. This is why - along with the difficulty of handling feral cats - that there are diseases and/or injuries that only require relatively simple treatment in pet cats, but that may justify the euthanasia of a feral cat.

Another aspect to be taken into account, for example in cases of orthopaedic surgeries with limb amputations, is that they affect not only the ability of the cat to escape from possible dangers inherent in street life, but also its position within the hierarchy of the colony. Never let a feral cat, in treatment, loose in a room in the house, even in the bathroom.

A loose cat will search for a place to hide or will literally start climbing walls to try to escape, making it very difficult to put it back in a carrier. Keeping it in a treatment cage is the safest method.

Materials needed:

- Cage at least 118 cm long x 78 cm wide x 84 cm tall;
- Carrier that has a door that opens outwards;
- Small litter box;
- Cat litter;
- Broomstick or something similar;
- Sheet;
- Newspapers;
- Plates for food and water;
- String;
- Small towel.

Fully assembled, the cage should look like the image below. The floor is lined with newspaper. The carrier, with the towel inside it, is at the back in a corner. The door of the carrier should open to the side of the cage that the carrier is leaning against, not

to the middle. Next to the carrier is the litter box. Ideally, the box should be firmly against the carrier, to help to keep it in place. The containers of food and water are placed in front, near the cage door. Cover the entire cage with a sheet.



- **Placing the cat in the cage**

Do not try to let the cat out directly from the carrier to the cage because both the carrier's and the cage door will be open, and the cat can easily escape. To free the cat inside the cage, follow these steps:

1. Place the carrier with the cat inside in a rear corner of the cage. The placement will depend on which side the door of the carrier opens.
2. Block the door of the carrier by sliding the stick through both sides of the cage, right in front of the door of the carrier.
3. Unpin the carrier door.
4. Place food and water at the front of the cage.
5. Close and lock the cage door.

6. Remove the stick and then use it to reach the inside of the cage through the bars (it's easier if you do this from above) and open the door of the carrier until it is pulled over against the side of the cage.
7. Use the string to tie the carrier door to the cage keeping it from closing.
8. Cover the cage fully with a sheet to keep the cat calm.



- **Feeding and cleaning**

To be able to open the door of the cage for cleaning, the cat needs to be inside the carrier. Normally this isn't a problem since feral cats will spend most of their time inside it because it is the confined and dark space available in the cage. If the cat is out of the carrier when you need to open the cage, it will tend to enter the carrier as soon as you approach. If the cat begins to get used to its surroundings and does not enter the carrier immediately, remove part of the sheet covering the cage. If the cat remains motionless, lightly touch one side of the cage. If none of this works, wait, cover the cage and try again later. Never open the cage door if the cat is outside the carrier.

Once the cat is in the carrier, follow these steps:

1. Detach the string that secures the carrier door to the side of the cage;
2. Close the carrier door using the stick;
3. Secure the carrier door by sliding the stick on both sides of the cage, just in front of the carrier door;

4. Open the cage door;
5. For extra security, lock the carrier door;
6. Clean everything and leave food and fresh water at the front of the cage;
7. Unlock the carrier door;
8. Close and lock the cage door;
9. Remove the stick;
10. Maneuver the stick to open the carrier door;
11. Re-attach the carrier door to the side of the cage with the string;
12. Cover it completely with the sheet;

If you prefer, to make cleaning easier, you can remove the carrier (with the cat inside) from the cage, not forgetting to lock the door to the carrier in advance.



Foster Families

Being a foster family is a very important decision that should be taken only after you have fully understood the responsibility and work that it entails. The whole family must be involved in the decision-making process. Foster families have a fundamental role in TNR programmes because they allow for kittens and friendly cats to be removed quickly from the colony, in order to start preparing them for a life in a home environment, and taking care of their physical and emotional needs while awaiting a safe and permanent family.

To be a foster family working with an organisation it is important to define from the very beginning:

- Who will be responsible for the expenses with the animal (feeding, vet bills, grooming, etc.);
- Who will make the fundamental decisions in relation to the animal's wellbeing and health;
- Responsibilities in the process of finding adoption families;
- Expectations regarding the duration of the animal stay in the foster home.



Foster Families

Finding good families: the adoption procedures

It is not always simple to find a permanent family for a cat who will be responsible long term for the cat. There are those who adopt an animal on a temporary impulse, who offer an animal to someone who doesn't want one, who just want the cat to hunt mice or don't have the financial capacity to properly care for a cat.

In order to protect the cat and ensure that it stays in a good home, there are certain procedures that must always be followed. Firstly, ask a lot of questions and don't be afraid to ask personal ones. The right person will understand your motives and will be happy to answer them. See on the next page the example of the questionnaire used by Animais de Rua. Charging an adoption fee is important. Inevitably adopting an animal entails expenses.

Anyone wishing to adopt an animal should have the financial capacity to pay the fee comfortably. It is also important to explain that the fee will go towards the animal expenses, like neutering, vaccination, identification, deworming, etc. Otherwise, they will hardly pay the veterinary clinic bill if the cat gets sick, or something simpler like ensuring the annual vaccine.

A good adopter will understand that you ask these questions and demands because you care about the animal.

If you have several kittens ask the adopter if he is willing to take in two kittens, explaining that it is the most advantageous situation for them and that adopting two ends up giving less work than one: they entertain themselves playing with each other, require less attention, can be left alone for more time, etc.

In order to attract the ideal adopter (who will eventually appear if you are patient), place ads on social networks, specialized websites, veterinary clinics, pet shops, commercial establishments, etc. **The announcement should have a few good photos of the animal - quality photographs are essential:**

- Be focused and sharp;
- Have enough lighting;
- Show clearly the characteristics of the animal, bringing out its best features;
- Have an acceptable background;
- Avoid dark, blurry photos, or bad composition which does not clearly show the animal, or photos with a confusing background which takes away the focus from the animal.

Also write a short text that covers the following aspects:

- The cat's name;
- One or two sentences with the animals' history and personality;
- Specific information about the animal (if it's neutered, dewormed, vaccinated, etc.);
- Refer to the existence of a screening process and the need to sign a term of responsibility;
- Information about the payment of an adoption fee.



Annex Y

Questionnaire For Potential Adopters

Whereas:

The animals that the Associação Animais de Rua makes available for adoption have, almost all, remarkable life stories. Even the youngest may have already gone through difficult times. We therefore have an obligation to provide them with the best adopters, ensuring that they will never return to the street and that they will never feel - or never return to feel - the weight of neglect and abuse. Almost all the animals that we have available for adoption have touching stories about their life. Even the younger ones may have already gone through difficult moments.

The process of adopting Street Animals involves, in a first phase, filling out this questionnaire, which will help us to gauge whether your family is ready to receive an animal. You should therefore fill it out clearly and as completely as possible. Upon approval of the questionnaire by the team responsible for adoptions, a home visit will be scheduled. We have an obligation to provide the cats with the best adopters, ensuring they will have a safe and happy life.

The home visit is a fundamental step in the adoption process and aims to assess whether the animal you have chosen will be the most appropriate to the conditions of your home and family, as well as helping to identify potential risk factors that can be eliminated. The intention of a home visit is assessing the safety and adequacy of the home environment. The percentage of dogs and cats who run away from home in the first few weeks after the adoption is high so this visit can also serve the purpose of addressing possible risks within the house.

Each animal has unique characteristics, which will adapt better or worse to the lifestyle of each one. You should not base your choice solely on the physical appearance of the animal, or on its age. You should think about whether the chosen animal is the most suitable taking into account your current situation and the prospects for the future. Each animal has a unique character that will fit better or worse with each person's lifestyle. You should not choose the animal solely based on looks or age. You should consider if the animal is the most appropriate, taking into account your current situation and prospects for the future.

Before you start filling out the questionnaire, remember that adopting an animal brings with it responsibilities. For informational purposes, we send along with this questionnaire those we believe are the duties of a good adopter.

Personal Data

- Name:
- Birth date:
- Nationality:
- Address:
- Phone:
- Email:
- Profession:

Animal To Adopt

- What animal do you want to adopt?
- Is it for you or to be offered as a gift?

NOTE: It must be the person who will receive the animal to fill out this questionnaire, we do not deliver animals intended for offer to third parties.

- What is the main reason for adopting this animal? What characteristics are you looking for in a pet?

Housing And Household

- What type of housing do you live in?
- Do you live close to a busy road which animals can access in a moment of distraction?
- Animals like the sun, does your house have natural light? Do you have an outside space or a small balcony? Are there protections on windows and balconies, on the terrace or in the garden?
- If you live in an apartment, does the condominium allow the presence of animals in the building?
- If you live in a rented house, does the landlord allow you to have pets?
- How is your household composed?
- If applicable, does everyone in your household agree with the adoption? Are there any household members allergic to animals?
- If you have children at home, how old are they? Have they ever had pets? Do they have regular contact with animals?

Pet Care

- Do you have other animals at home?
- If so, what species? Male or female? Are they sociable? How old are they?
- What is their health status (FIV or FeLV positive, for example)? Are they neutered? If not, why?

- Have you had pets before? If yes, what happened to them?
- What kind of food do/did you feed them? Are/were they assisted by a veterinarian? Which clinic?
- Have you thought about where your new pet will live? Inside or outside? If it's outside, how will you provide for its care?
- It is possible that a dog or a cat may damage pieces of furniture. If this happens how will you react? What do you think should be done?
- Will the animal be able to go out in the street? Under what circumstances? With or without supervision?
- Can someone in the household guarantee time to walk the dog (at least three times a day) or that the cat will have company and playtime every day?
- When you go on holiday do you plan to take your pet with you or do you have someone who will care for them while you are away? Please elaborate.
- A pet is a lifetime commitment, as it can live between 10 and 15 years (20 for a cat). Are you ready to take on the responsibility of caring for the animal for its lifetime?
- What if your current situation changes (for example, change of job and/or house)? If, due to unforeseeable circumstances, you are no longer able to take care of your pet, how do you plan to resolve this issue?
- Are you aware of the values practised in quality food and veterinary medical care for the animal? Is it financially viable for this? Do you accept and agree to a home visit, as well as subsequent follow-up visits, on dates to schedule with you?
- The adoption takes place through the payment of an adoption fee in the amount of 25 € referring to veterinary expenses as well as the signing of a Term of Responsibility, at the time of delivery of the animal, **which we transcribe here:**
 1. In order to formalize the adoption, you will need to sign an Adoption Contract (see example in Annex X)
 2. Do you agree to these terms?
 3. Do you have any information you would like to add?
 4. Once completed, send the questionnaire by email to [insert organisation email].
If the questionnaire is approved, we will contact you to schedule a home visit.

Thank you,

Animais de Rua

NOTE: your data will not be disclosed under any circumstances to third parties, except for the authorities if we find the animal is in any way put in danger or its welfare is compromised.

Annex X

Adoption Contract

I, _____,
 Resident in _____
 Postal Code _____, Place _____
 Telephone _____, E-mail _____,
 Identification Document N.º _____ Become in this date owner and
 responsible for the animal.

Animal details

Name _____
 ID _____
 Microchip number _____
 Gender _____
 Age _____
 Physical characteristics (fur, tail, colour, etc.) _____

"I declare, on my word of honor, that I commit to take care of the mentioned animal, ensuring its safety, comfort and physical and psychological well-being until the end of its life. I pledge to comply with each of the items in this declaration, including those in annex 1, about which I was able to freely inform and advise myself, having been explained to me at the time of adoption.

If, at any time, I feel unable to satisfy these requirements, I pledge to not sell the animal, nor abandon it in a public or private space, nor give it to third parties without prior authorization of Animais de Rua.

If the animal dies or runs away, I pledge to immediately contact Animais de Rua I hereby authorise visits to verify the welfare, safety, and hygiene of the animal by elements of the Associação Animais de Rua in date to be scheduled by mutual agreement, committing myself not to claim unavailability for more than 30 days in a row .It is my duty to inform Animais de Rua of any change in my personal data included in this term of responsibility.

I also declare the veracity of all of my personal elements above."

NOTE on the General Data Protection Regime.

Do you confirm that you are aware of the privacy terms and conditions of Animais de Rua on the website: <https://animaisderua.org/privacy-policy/>?

Yes _____

No _____

Do you agree that the details provided in this form are stored for the period necessary to manage the adoption process of the animal for which you are applying?

Yes _____

No _____

If your personal contact details change do you undertake to inform Animais de Rua?

Yes _____

No _____

Do you authorise us to use photographs on social media, of the animal already in your home, in order to encourage adoption?

Yes _____

No _____

Place, DD of MM of YYYY

Adopter

Animais de Rua representative responsible for the adoption

NOTE: Presenting the identity document and proof of residency is mandatory.

Identification of the Animais de Rua representative responsible for the adoption:

Name: _____

Email: _____

Telephone: _____

Annex 1

Duties Of The Adopter

1. Feed the animal a premium quality food (kibble, canned or natural alternatives) appropriate to its age and body condition. In case of doubt, please ask your vet for their opinion.
2. Always provide fresh and clean water.
3. Never give milk to the cat.
4. Make regular visits to the veterinarian, according to the consultation schedule prescribed to it.
5. Take the animal to the veterinarian whenever the health situation is urgent or the animal's life may be at risk, incurring the crime of mistreatment of pet animals if you do not do so.
6. Provide moments of daily attention and playtime to the animal.
7. When adopting an adult animal, remember that it almost always feels insecure and out of place. So, there is a high probability of trying to escape, until it learns to feel safe and integrated in the new environment. In order to minimise the risks of a possible escape or of a permanent disappearance, the adopter undertakes to:
 - In the case of adopting a dog, do not let the dog loose in the garden for the first few nights. At least during the night, it is essential to let him sleep inside the house, since most escapes happen at night, when the animal feels more alone and scared. High walls and seemingly secure fences are no deterrent for an animal determined to flee.
 - Take the dog for a walk at least 4 or 5 times a day while it's a puppy, and at least 3 times in adulthood, and one of the walks should be at least 45 minutes.
 - It is detrimental to the health of the animal to force it to wait longer to do its needs.
 - Identify the animal as soon as it comes into your possession. The animal must be identified using a microchip.
 - Never hit or yell at the animal because it did its needs at home. The best way to teach him is to take him to the right place when the animal wakes up and finishes eating, which are the times when the animal is most likely to do his needs, and congratulate him when he gets it right. The use of physical or verbal punishment only leaves the animal frightened and confused. He will get it right out of the desire to please you, not out of fear of being punished. Corporal punishment of the animal will be considered a crime of mistreatment of pet animals.
 - Respond for any damage to private property, attacks that your pet may infringe on other animals or even people. Comply with the current laws on responsible ownership of pets.

- Comply with any legislation to be created that benefits animal welfare or encourages responsible ownership.

Safety Tips

1. When you first take home an adult adopted animal, keep in mind that in the beginning they will most certainly feel insecure. Until they learn to feel secure and integrated into the new environment there is a high likelihood they may try to escape and run away. Identify the animal as soon as it has passed into your possession. The animal must be identified by a microchip, but in addition it is essential to always have a metal tag hanging on its collar. A tag is an easy, convenient, and inexpensive way to identify the animal and unlike the microchip, is well visible.
2. Be especially cautious with open doors, windows and balconies: a small distraction can cause a serious accident. There are several models of nets available to close up windows and balconies, making them accessible for the cat.
3. If your cat runs away, begin searching for it immediately. The first 24 hours are vital to find it close to home. Walk the neighbourhood with its favourite treat, calling out its name. Leave some food at your door, and the litterbox, if possible. Post its disappearance on specific websites, social media and print out leaflets and distribute them in the neighbourhood, veterinary clinics and the local homing centres.
4. When teaching the cat to use the litter box, never punish it for accidents. The best way to teach it is to take it to the litter box as soon as it wakes up and after every meal. Use positive reinforcement.
5. Cats like to chew and sometimes eat plants. Be careful not to keep any plants that are toxic to cats.
6. Always check your washing machines before starting them. Cats sometimes hide inside them.



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